Chapter 5

Introduction to the Case Studies

Case Study Methodology

The methodology for the case studies consisted of a questionnaire for teachers, the examination of school documentation for both evaluations and professional development, and focus group discussions with students. This approach provided the research with three complementary views into the topic: teacher opinions, the formal stated position of the administration, and the perspective of the direct consumers. The outcome illuminates both the formal position, and informal reality, of evaluation and professional development in each school. Furthermore, the case study investigations expand on the statistical outcomes of the state wide survey and allow a more intimate understanding of individual teacher attitudes, emotions, and motivations.

In general, school administrations were not enthusiastic to be part of this research. In a number of cases letters to principals went unanswered with negative responses being conveyed by secretaries after a telephone reminder. In one case, a senior member of staff mentioned informally that the school was undertaking preliminary work on evaluation based on Danielson's (1996) framework. However, the Principal subsequently declined the research application, an interesting response given that the research might have informed the process that the school was about to undertake. Excuses for non-participation, such as a building program, also did not accord with what would have been a very minor intrusion into the life of schools.

Reluctance of principals to participate in this research may be explained by Elmore's (2000) concept of 'buffering', with management shielding the vulnerable technical core in their schools from scrutiny. Research into evaluation and professional development touches on issues of teacher quality that principals might not want examined, as the results might undermine the public face of the school. Another explanation might be that principals felt their teachers did not need any additional demands at a time when schools were attempting to implement widespread curricular change in Tasmania. Whatever the explanation, it is unfortunate that it was difficult to sell research addressing the quality of teachers' pedagogy in a fundamental and ongoing fashion. This also raised the issue that, if teachers were true professionals, then there would be no reason to approach principals to approve such surveys and studies. That principals have the final say over individual teacher participation in research that could collectively benefit teachers' professional practice, suggests the subordination of

teachers within schools, and supports Ramsey's (2000) contention that teachers are not professionals in the true sense.

High schools were selected for the case studies for the following reasons:

- Consistency would be maintained with the state wide survey, which was directed particularly at Year 10 teachers.

- The range of opinions would reflect different age groups of developing maturity as well as experience in the school over a period of time, This was opposed to college students from diverse feeder schools may lack experience in their current institution, or primary students who might be too young to appreciate some of the issues raised.

- High schools were the subject of major curricular change at the time of the study. This brought into focus issues addressed in this study, such as teachers' willingness to experiment and risk failure with new teaching approaches, and the appropriate application and validation of professional development.

Teacher Survey Instrument

The survey instrument was devised in three sections: evaluation, professional development, and school and individual perceptions. These were intended to yield data for the study of the two main thematic areas, as well as illuminate individual teacher professional and attitudinal responses to their school and their pedagogy. It was expected that this would provide a combined perspective on individual teachers, the likely recipients of externally imposed standards, and those who might be expected to establish and utilize a professional process of reflective evaluation. The following sections explain the evaluation instrument, which is at Appendix 3.

<u>Evaluation</u>

Questions on evaluation were broken into four areas: frequency and purpose, inputs, management, and individual responses. Given the background of the review of research and the state wide survey, it was unlikely that the case studies would reveal formalised widespread reflective evaluation. For this reason, questions in this area were directed to expand on the responses of teachers who claimed evaluation in the broader survey. Also, the response range of *Strongly Disagree* through to *Strongly Agree* was supplemented by an *Unable to Answer* column for those who had not been evaluated.

Frequency and Purpose of Evaluation

The question on frequency and purpose of evaluation sought not only to determine if the surveyed teacher ever had experienced evaluation, but also to identify whether the teacher had been evaluated in the current year, or within the previous four years. It also asked if the teacher had knowledge of the role of, or received professional development on, evaluation, or else acted in the position of evaluator. By introducing evaluation in other career situations, this question sought to determine if career change teachers brought experience with them into the profession, thus expanding the knowledge base of work and performance evaluation.

The questions on experience were supported by identification of the purposes for evaluation: tenure, teaching practice, promotion, disciplinary requirements, or altered responsibilities. The answers would indicate whether the evaluation was directed at enhancing pedagogy, was conducted for accountability or administrative purposes, or was part of the procedural requirements for advancement.

Inputs to Evaluation

Those teachers who had been evaluated were asked to indicate both the formally mandated elements of the process, and the sources of inputs. The inputs list would indicate the contribution of stakeholders, namely students and parents, as opposed to procedural inputs, such as diaries and portfolios, observation, and the examination of teaching documentation. Ideally, an evaluation directed towards identifying issues of pedagogy would include a broad range of contributors. More administrative evaluations might consult documentation, but may be less likely to consult students or parents. Whichever the case, it was expected that the subjects of the evaluation would be conversant with the bases for evaluation judgements. Also, consistency of inputs would be expected within schools if teachers were to feel that the evaluation procedure was fair and equitable.

The list of suggested formal evaluation elements was adapted from Danielson (1996). The elements were:

      Knowledge of Content & Pedagogy
      Knowledge of Students
      Selection of Instructional Goals
      Knowledge of Resources
      Design of Coherent Instruction
      Assessing Student Learning
      Establishment of Respect & Rapport

Establishment of a Culture of Learning
Management of Student Behaviour
Organisation of Physical Space
Clear & Accurate Communication
Questioning & Discussion Techniques
Engagement of Students in Learning
Provision of Feedback to Students
Level of Flexibility & Responsiveness
Self-reflection on Teaching
Maintenance of Records
Communication with Families
Contribution to School & professional community
Professional Development

If evaluation was to have any claim of pedagogical validity then it ought to include a substantial representation of these elements, in particular those such as knowledge of content, and design of coherent instruction. These elements and others on the list, such as the establishment of a culture of learning, are fundamental to the classroom teacher's craft and cannot be easily ignored in preference to record keeping or organisation of physical space. The latter whilst important in themselves, represent more observable functions that support, but are not critical to, student learning and understanding. Administratively targeted evaluations might include the management of student behaviour, the maintenance of records, and professional development, but omit the fundamental pedagogical matters of instructional design and coherence, and self-reflection, that would figure more in evaluations targeted at pedagogy. The absence of any of these elements would suggest that pedagogy was unlikely to have been considered at all in the evaluation. Variations between the perceptions of teachers as to which of these areas had been covered in their evaluations would suggest flaws in consistency of application, or shortfalls in understanding among teachers of the purposes of the evaluation procedure itself.

Management of Evaluation

Questions on management focussed on teacher perceptions of the execution of the evaluation and the procedures surrounding it. In the pre-evaluation area, teachers were asked if they were confident in the training and abilities of their evaluator. Teacher views on the comprehensive consideration and reconciliation of inputs to ensure balance, and the full coverage of all skill and knowledge areas, were contrasted against whether they felt assured that personality issues did not intrude. Such questions sought to determine if teachers perceived their evaluation process as thorough and objective. If this was the case, and staff members were able to be professional participants in evaluation, then it was expected that teachers would express trust in

the evaluation process. If trust was expressed, yet there were flaws in the application of the evaluation, then it was likely that teachers were responding based on school or sector loyalties rather than an expectation that the evaluation was fully professional, comprehensive, and effective in its application. Conversely, even very positive responses in these management areas could be undermined by lack of trust, which would suggest that teachers were invoking coping behaviours and presenting other than pedagogical reality to the evaluation, as discussed in the organisation theory section of Chapter 2.

These management questions were matched by teacher perceptions of post evaluation outcomes. Respondents were requested to indicate who they considered benefited from the evaluation: themselves, the school, or the students. Thereafter a number of questions sought to determine if there was any impact on pedagogy, professionalism, and institutional well-being. From the point of pedagogy, teachers ideally should indicate benefits to themselves and the students, and feel increasingly professional and organisationally valuable. If teachers felt that the evaluation was either administrative or threatening, then their responses would either be that it had nothing to do with teaching, or that hierarchical and sex imbalances were reinforced.

Individual Responses to Evaluation

Individual teacher responses to evaluation were measured firstly as emotions, ranging from anger and suspicion, through ambivalence and apathy, to optimism and enthusiasm. Regardless of whether the evaluation was aimed at organisational accountability or pedagogy, the review of research has indicated that individuals experiencing fear and concern were more likely to manifest defensive and coping behaviours, rather than openness to change and enhancement of professional practice.

These emotional responses were backed up by the identification of teachers' actions after the evaluation. The potential options, once again, ranged from the positive through to negative. Positive responses included increased commitment, enthusiasm for promotion, a review of shortfalls and the setting of goals. Negative responses included focussing on the negatives, complaining to peers, and attempting to forget the evaluation until next time. The reactions, which might indicate either negativity or ambivalence were: keeping a low profile, adjusting the work level to meet perceived feelings of appreciation, and changing teaching to keep the supervisor happy. Clearly, the negative responses would diminish individual professional responsibility and generate compliance and avoidance. At worst, they would establish

negativity that would extend to the school and to the idea of evaluation in general. In the end, neither teachers nor students would benefit.

<u>Professional Development</u>

The professional development section of the survey noted the extent of teachers' participation and their opinions about pedagogical improvement over the past year. The survey then addressed the main areas of motivation and selection, outcomes, and respondent views of professional development practices in the school. If evaluation of pedagogy did not occur, the basis for teacher participation was open to question. Similarly, comprehensive follow up of professional development should determine not only if the learning had been internalised and applied in the classroom, but also identify additional learning needs. Teachers who passively participate in directed school professional development to which they may not be committed, or of which they are suspicious or cynical, would seem unlikely to derive much benefit from such activities. Similarly, if the needs of the teachers cannot be gauged, then the basis for developing school professional development and its effectiveness is open to question. Because professional development was expected to yield responses in all cases, a normal *Strongly Disagree* through to *Strongly Agree* scale was used.

<u>Professional Development Motivation & Selection</u>

This set of questions attempted to access as many opinions as possible on motivational attitudes, not just through the positive, negative, and ambivalent, but also by including an option of steering professional development primarily towards career requirements. The positive end of the questions was reflected in the identification of professional development as a key part of modern practice, and an invigorating opportunity to refresh skills through selection of useful learning. The more negative end of the scale was marked by statements that professional development was a good break from class, or something that was done to teachers. Once again the ambivalent or apathetic attitude was included, based on statements that professional development was something done to teachers, or a mere function of industrial awards. It was not intended that teacher responses to these questions would simply bracket them into one of three categories. Teachers who saw professional development as invigorating and renewing might still enjoy a break from the classroom. However, this also might intimate that they were not truly professionally independent, and that the invigoration may not necessarily be student directed.

Teachers were asked how their professional development objectives were set each year. The questions ranged from the school setting annual objectives through a consultative process within the faculty or with the teacher's supervisor, to individual teacher perceptions of their own needs. The management aspect was raised in asking whether there was any form of consolidation, or review, to ensure consistency with, and applicability to the school's aims.

The objectives led on to professional development selections that would illustrate individual teacher motivations as opposed to structural processes. Doing what one was told represented the only question in the ambivalent sector in this area, as conformity had been addressed in other questions. Consequently, the review of annual training requirements, advice from the supervisor or professional development officer, and financial constraints represented more positive considerations. Less positive decisions for selection included missing as many classes as possible, finding something that was easy and likely to be fun, and meeting the requirement with as little effort as possible. There was a greater possibility that responses would be bracketed in this question, although conformity behaviours might still be reflected as consultations that were ignored by the teacher.

Professional Development Outcomes

The outcomes section of the teacher survey commenced with identification of the form of professional development reporting: a verbal or comprehensive written report, a detailed evaluation sheet, or a short note on the relevant form. There followed a series of questions on whether the supervisor, professional development officer, or school followed up and validated the impact of the teacher's learning on classroom practice. This section also included teacher reactions, so that respondents who were followed up could immediately register that validated professional development enhanced their feelings of professionalism and collegiality. Similarly, teachers were asked their response to propositions that the heading on the appraisal form merely listed their professional development participation, rather than its impact, and that professional development represented isolated events that did not contribute to organisational goals. More detailed questions on professional development outcomes were not posed in this survey in anticipation of input from students, the best and most consistent observers in the classroom.

School Professional Development Practices

Questions on school professional development practices examined the types of professional development, attitudes to whole school activities, and overall teacher perceptions of

professional development in the school. The types of professional development covered collective activities, such as conferences, seminars and workshops, courses outside the school, and activities focussed on individual needs, such as mentoring and reflection on teaching. One element asked if the professional development consisted of a broad range of activities based on each individual's needs, which is the optimal solution from the perspective of this study.

The examination of whole school professional development was based on common criticisms regarding the irrelevance of such events to teachers' real needs. Respondents were asked if whole school events were boring and achieved little, whether they were a chance for hierarchical self-promotion and enrichment of consultants, or if they represented a chance to get away from class. At the same time, the questions in this area allowed teachers to indicate positive attitudes, such as whole school professional development being stimulating, and a real force for change.

The section on professional development perceptions asked if teachers saw the system in their school as dynamic, effective, well managed, and responsive, and as one that drew teachers into a professional community of lifelong learners. In addition, it asked if there existed a clear connection to the evaluation system so that teachers could see how they were developing their practice. Conversely, teachers were asked their opinion on propositions that professional development was an inefficient token gesture.

Lastly in the area of professional development, teachers were asked to indicate their participation in ongoing learning, particularly postgraduate learning. It was considered by this researcher that others seeking to improve their pedagogy might go outside of established school professional development arrangements and turn to post-graduate study as the only currently available means for higher-level dialogue on teaching.

School and Individual Perceptions & Aspirations
School Perceptions

Questions to teachers about their school sought to determine if there was a coherent feeling of collegiality that provided support for teachers attempting new forms of pedagogy. This section focussed on positive propositions with the only negative being the identification of the school as having a conflicting series of cliques, a condition referred to as "Balkanization" in some research. Other than this negative, respondents were asked if their school encouraged and mobilised them to act as agents of change in a collegial environment where dialogue was

welcomed, and parental feedback was encouraged, whilst the positives of older teaching styles were respected and not discarded. More than in any other area, this question sought to establish if teachers felt secure, supported, and encouraged in their endeavours to meet student learning needs.

<u>Individual Identity and Aspirations</u>

The survey then turned to questions of individual identity in current practice, as well as professional aspirations. Once again, positive propositions figured in the majority. The only two negatives were focussing on the coverage of course content, and doubts about the value of change. Teachers were asked to respond to propositions that they examined their own pedagogy actively to generate learning of high professional standards, that they interacted with others in constructive openness, and that they worked to appreciate student learning needs.

In the aspirations area, teachers were asked if they sought to feel less isolated, to become more openly collegial, and to be able to freely acknowledge mistakes in their teaching. From the perspective of recognition, respondents were asked if they wanted the positives in their teaching to be acknowledged, and for school systems to support them better in developing new pedagogy. This question touched on the issue of teachers developing professionalism, as opposed to acting as wage earning process workers. Ideally, teachers should seek greater openness, collegiality, and to be in an environment of ongoing cooperative development, where input from all is welcomed as contributing to the enhancement of the professional product - classroom teaching and learning.

Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussion questions were directed at identifying evidence of any evaluation processes, be they official or individually initiated, and any behaviours that might suggest movement towards professional reflective evaluation of teaching. In the area of professional development, the discussion sought to identify the transfer of such learning into the classroom through either explicit or implicit means. The initial list of questions is at Appendix 4. Whilst the broad outline was adhered to, questions were modified and expanded upon to avoid an excessively formal and distant tone, to ensure student understanding of the researcher's intent, and to help make students feel relaxed and open in the discussion.

At this point it should be noted that, in general, the student interest, participation, and frankness was illuminating and refreshing. The tone of most of the focus group discussion was optimistic

and interested, although the cynicism of some students was surprising. The student comments are reported verbatim in the chapters and the transcripts both to accurately represent the comments made, and to provide a sense of the students' openness and participation.

<u>Have you ever conducted an evaluation of a teacher?</u>

The evaluation questions asked students not only if they had ever seen evaluation as a formal event, but also how they may have been involved as partners in such a learning event. Where evaluation had not been observed, students were asked their opinion on the verification of teachers' pedagogy, how they would feel about participating in such a process, and, in particular, whether such an evaluation opportunity would turn into a popularity contest. With the likelihood of evaluation responses being low, this latter question assumed greater importance in determining the attitude of students to an interactive dialogue on teaching practice with regard to their learning outcomes.

<u>Have you been in a classroom where a more senior person comes in to watch?</u>

The state-wide survey of teacher observation activities was followed up by student perceptions of observation events, in an attempt to expand on the actual pedagogical learning value of the reported observation events by the minority of teachers identified in the quantitative survey. This would not only verify the quantitative data, but also indicate whether, in the case study schools, teachers were participating in the sharing of pedagogical practices, or whether they remained isolated with observation relegated to other purposes such as support of internship programs.

<u>What do you consider are the characteristics of a good teacher?</u>

Case study focus group students were asked their opinions on what made both good and poor teachers. The reasons behind this were twofold. Firstly, it was hoped that students would reveal that their judgements were based on other than just mere teacher popularity, or work avoidance motivations. Secondly, it was expected that evidences of both good and poor teaching would reveal whether communication occurs between students and teachers about practices and styles that are effective in generating learning. Communication about successful pedagogy in the classroom may reveal an informal dialogue between teacher and students aimed at achieving both the best understanding and outcomes. Conversely, the absence of dialogue would suggest that informal reflective evaluation processes are absent, with teachers not seeking input to the effectiveness of their teaching where it matters most - in the classroom and in response to pupil needs.

Within this section of the discussion, efforts were made to move beyond individual student opinion to determine if perceptions were widespread. Students were asked how they knew they were not the only ones to have a particular view on a certain teacher, or that they were not just responding to lesser outcomes based on their own inadequacies or prejudices. One student may not like a particular teacher, but a consensus between members of a class might indicate some common teaching issue that requires attention. In this sense, classes might not "gang up" on a teacher, but, rather, be reacting collectively to concerns with teaching practice.

What is the response of the school, other teachers, and parents?

These questions sought, firstly, to determine school reactions to student attempts to change classes in response to concerns about teaching quality. If schools were focussed on achieving the best for student learning, then student attempts to change classes should signal issues of pedagogy and professional practice that may need investigation and remediation. If schools attempted to avoid such changes, then it would suggest the maintenance of teacher status regardless of consumer confidence, and the support of the institutional stature of adult teachers over pupil learning. In this case, reflective evaluation, and teacher quality and development in real professional terms, would be subsumed by the need for maintenance of institutional confidence and perpetuation of the veneer of teacher equivalence.

Teachers' informal responses to student complaints about other teachers were raised to determine if, in fact, some teachers acknowledge pedagogical shortfalls amongst their peers, or whether teachers close ranks in the face of the common student "enemy". Similarly, parents would be likely to form a view of individual teacher effectiveness, particularly if subsequent children attended the same school with many members of the same faculty. Students were asked how their parents responded to their complaints, and whether they took active steps to redress the imbalance in teaching quality. It was expected that, through these questions, the focus group would reveal if there was a channel of input to teachers through peers and parents of the standards of their practice, and whether these could act as motivators for informal reflection and remediation by teachers of pedagogical practices.

If a teacher made the effort…would you help?

Following the above discussions, students were asked if they would support a teacher making genuine efforts to improve the quality of their teaching. This certainly was a key question as it sought to determine both the maturity and willingness of students in their involvement in the enhancement of their own learning through an ongoing dialogue to help teachers identify the

most appropriate pedagogy for them. If students offered potentially valuable inputs into the evaluation of pedagogy, then a couple of valid questions could be asked. Why had they not been mobilised, or indeed consulted about the impact of teaching upon them? Alternatively, if they had been consulted, why has this not continued to expand into a condition of widespread reflective pedagogy, and been reflected in teacher quality and standards research?

<u>Explain what you understand by the term 'professional development'?</u>

The section on professional development sought to answer questions on what students understood by the term professional development, and if they saw the outcomes of teacher participation in the classroom. Whilst it included questions on parental perceptions and attitudes, students were the prime focus. If students were able to identify professional development outcomes, then it could be argued that the systems in place were contributing to the enhancement of pedagogy, although evaluation mechanisms may not be in place. Once again, this would suggest informal reflective processes that enabled teachers to translate their own learning into the enhancement of student understanding and outcomes. Conversely, if students did not see the results, then current systems and processes may not be achieving the returns for investment of time and money into teacher professional learning.

Documentation

The only documentation referred to in the case studies is that provided by the schools and readily available to any teacher in the school. In most cases this was the staff handbook or equivalent, to which new teachers would refer for basic procedural directions. There was no intention on the part of the researcher to chase documentation through departmental channels. It was considered that any such deep or buried procedural forms would be inaccessible to the average teacher and, thus unlikely to influence daily teaching practice.

Reporting of Case Study Results

Case study teacher responses are reported intentionally in narrative form. As a practising teacher, the researcher was concerned that quantitative analysis reduced individuals to a generic status of *teachers*, which in itself intimates a depersonalised equivalence. From the examination of research, the missing perspective that appeared essential for teacher professionalism to progress forwards, was that of the individual practitioner dealing with issues in unique classes with unique student demands, and seeking to address individual professional development needs in within a particular school and series of class situations.

If teachers have not addressed their own needs for professional reflective evaluation, then the explanation and solution is less likely to be in quantitative data. Rather it will be in the isolated stories of individual teachers who require support to adopt new practices and approaches. To appreciate the needs of teachers, their motivations, concerns, fears, and indeed errors, it was felt that this research had to put a face to teachers in schools. Reduction of the case study surveys to individual teacher stories represented one approach to this objective, extracting the information from individuals whilst retaining their anonymity and personal dignity. The cost of this approach may be some repetition in the actual survey outcomes between individual teachers. However, as the product of each individual teacher's thoughts, considerations, concerns, prejudices, fears, and aspirations, each response retains a unique identity.

Furthermore, this approach was adopted to provide teachers with a voice that so far appears to have been absent from the discussions about teacher quality and evaluation in Australia in general. From the perspective of this research, and for the advancement of teacher professionalism as a whole, it should be possible to remove each teacher from the case studies, and identify where they need support and assistance in pedagogical terms. That should be the starting point for each evaluation and professional development objective. If research accepts the needs of each teacher, rather than an imposed collective identity, then the cause of teacher professionalism in Tasmania, and that of reflective evaluation and effective professional development, is likely to be advanced.