PARTICIPATION IN A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT GROUP – PERSPECTIVES OF STAFF AT A SPECIALIST FURTHER EDUCATION COLLEGE

Margaret Chiu Wan Mo

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Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

School of Education, Communication & Language Sciences

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Dedication

To my parents. The sacrifices you have made have enabled your children to have the opportunities in life that you never had. All I have accomplished is because of your love and support.

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I would never have successfully completed this thesis without the unending patience, support and guidance of my supervisor, Dr Richard Parker.

Heartfelt thanks goes to everyone who participated in my study. I am acutely aware of your workload and the limited time you have, so I am grateful that you persevered with the Professional Development Groups. I hope you gained something positive from them.

My thanks and sincere appreciation goes to all my friends and colleagues who have encouraged me through this process.

Without the support of and encouragement of my employers, in particular my supervisor Lynne Moxon, I would never have been able to start my Doctorate. Thank you for all that you have done.

Finally, much love and thanks goes my family for their unwavering support. It has at times been a difficult journey but I'm finally there!

ABSTRACT

Background: The government is keen for young people to remain in some form of education or training, at least until the age of 18. The government believes that the FE sector is central to transforming the life chances of young people and adults and to the prosperity of the nation (Department for Education and Skills, 2006).

At present, the field of educational psychology is mainly funded by local authorities (British Psychological Society, 2009; Neville, 2009) and organised to address the needs of children and young people with the profession largely limiting itself to school age contexts. Research indicates that there are very few school and Educational Psychology Services around the world with a service that incorporate post-school aspects (Jimerson, Oakland, & Farrell, 2007; MacKay, 2009).

The past 30 years have witnessed tremendous growth in training research, particularly in the last decade. There is now a wealth of research indicating that investing in teacher learning and professional development improves the quality of teaching. Research on the impact of CPD in education has also looked at the professional development of support staff, models of professional development (Starkey *et al.*, 2009) and the range of initiatives in

professional development to support school improvement (Van Kraayenoord, 2003).

A review of the literature has found very little research into the area of post school Educational Psychology Services. Hellier (2009) reported that the provision of post school Educational Psychology Services is a new field of practice.

Aim: The main aim of this study was to explore the perceptions and views of staff, from a specialist further education college, who had taken part in meetings to determine whether there is an impact on staff development by analysing their how they talk about the process and how they felt participating in the meetings.

Method: Qualitative research methodology was adopted and a Grounded Theory approach was used. Focus group interviews were conducted with two groups of staff who had participated in Professional Development Group meetings to gather their views and opinions of the intervention. A semi-structured interview schedule was used to guide the focus group interviews. The focus group interviews were transcribed and Strauss and Corbin's (1990) Grounded Theory approach was adopted to analyse the data.

Findings: The findings from this study indicate that the Professional Development Groups could be described as Communities of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) which support Conversational Learning (Baker, Jenson, & Kolb, 2002).

The findings also identify the conditions needed to support Conversational Learning.

Implications of the results of this study, plus reflections regarding the research process are also discussed.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction To Chapter 1

The introduction outlines the rationale for conducting this research. I will discuss the argument for educational psychology to extend its remit to post-compulsory education. This section will briefly look at the growth of research into the continuing professional development in education and the range of initiatives to support the professional development of staff.

The Literature Review starting on page 11 will look more closely at what I consider to be the main issues surrounding Continuing Professional Development in education and staff support groups, the effects of such training and the role of self-efficacy. I will also discuss how it is important to consider the role of adult learning particularly professional learning when setting up a professional development initiative.

In the Methodology section, starting on page 52, I will discuss the process of the study and outline the method used to collect data. A review of the Data Analysis and Findings starts on page 78.

Following the data analysis, a second literature review was conducted, the outcome of which is related back to the concepts developed through the data analysis starting on page 119. Finally the implications of this research,

further areas of research, and my reflections on the research process are discussed.

1.2   Aim Of The Study

The main aim of this study was to explore the perceptions of a group of college staff, from a specialist further education college (which will be known as "SFEC" throughout the study), following their participation in a Professional Development Group. SFEC offers provision for young adults with an Autism Spectrum Condition (see Appendix 1 for a profile of SFEC College). A cross-section of staff comprising tutors, learning support assistants (LSAs) and senior tutors participated in the research.

The study explored the perceptions and views of the staff who took part in the Professional Development Group meetings to determine whether there was an impact on staff development by analysing how they talked about the process and how they felt participating in the meetings.

Traditionally, the reporting of research is conducted in the third person as it is claimed to maintain objectivity, reduce bias and provide a sound basis for judging any claims made (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) go on to argue that the use of the third person, besides being tedious, may be 'distorting the very realities it is claiming to represent' (p. 338).

Therefore, 'I', as a participant-researcher with a significant role in the research, have written this thesis in first person as the use of 'I' in the text is consistent with the qualitative nature of the research. Using the 'active voice' in my writing recognises my engagement with the research and my role as an interpreter of the action (Sherman, 1993).

1.3 Background

1.3.1   Further Education

It is widely recognised that education and learning does not stop at the age of 16, and the government has been keen for young people to remain in some form of education or training, at least until the age of 18 (Department for Education and Skills [DfES] 2005, p. 206). Figures from 2007 indicate that more young people are staying on at school after the age of 16 (Department for Children, Schools and Families [DCSF] 2007). The proportion of 16-18 year olds remaining in education and training rose to just over 77% at the end of 2006 and the government was keen to raise this figure to 90% by 2015 (DfES, 2005). However, the White Paper did not detail any specific targets for the Further Education (FE) sector. The government believe that the FE sector is central to transforming the life chances of young people and adults and to the prosperity of the nation (DfES, 2006).

FE is primarily taught in FE Colleges, but there is also work-based learning, and adult and community learning institutions. This includes post-16 courses similar to those taught at schools, and 'sub-degree' courses similar to those taught at Higher Education (HE) colleges. Sub-degree courses include Higher National Diploma (HND), Higher National Certificate (HNC), Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE), Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE), foundation courses at HE level (foundation degree), and NVQ/SVQ levels 4 and 5 (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2006). A large number of universities work in partnership with FE colleges to enable higher education courses to run at FE colleges. Lenton (2005) suggests that the large proportion of those staying on in education between 1985 and 1991 was due to the increased provision of vocational courses. The DfES (2007a) suggested that moderate and low achievers are more motivated by vocational or work-based courses as learning is hands-on rather than conceptual which is relevant to the world of work that they will ultimately enter, and 'assessment is based more what you can do than what you can write' (p. 6).

Guishard (2000) reported that the FE sector has typically promoted and provided training opportunities for students with learning difficulties, enabling them to become independent citizens and enter the labour market. The majority of FE courses designed for students with learning difficulties focus on 'personal autonomy, transition into adulthood, consolidation of basic education and the development of social and practical vocational skills' (Guishard, 2000, p. 206). Guishard went on to conclude that the choice of FE is likely to remain one of the main options for young people reaching statutory school-leaving age and that educational psychology work in the FE sector would be valued.

1.3.2   Educational Psychology

At present, applied educational psychology in the United Kingdom is mainly funded by Local Authorities (British Psychological Society, 2009; Neville, 2009) and organised to address the needs of children and young people with the profession largely limiting itself to school age contexts. The restructuring of Educational Psychology Services has long been debated. As far back as 1956, Wall looked at the place of applied psychology in education in general. He proposed a comprehensive psychological service whose remit would be to ensure that 'all the needs are covered adequately at all stages of growth from pre-school period to integration into adult working life' (Wall, 1956, p. 122).

In 1997 Mitchell suggested that some college staff were unaware of the specialist support services that Educational Psychologists (EPs) can offer, and some EPs working primarily or exclusively in schools were unaware of the needs within the FE sector.

MacKay (2009) investigated whether the development of a post-school psychological service existed anywhere in the world. He found that in countries where there is an established Educational Psychology Service at

school age, the focus is overwhelmingly on that age group, 'to the neglect of older populations' (p. 11).

An international survey carried out by Jimerson, Oakland and Farrell (2007) of school and Educational Psychology Services found that there were few countries with a service that incorporated post-school aspects. MacKay (2009) suggested that the lack of such services is confirmed in the wider range of available international literature.

MacKay (2009) contends that, internationally, educational psychology is particularly focused on the application of psychology to educational issues in schools and early years settings. When reviewing future directions for professional educational psychology, Norwich (2005) looked at four different options for the profession, 'school psychologist', 'educational psychologist', 'child/youth psychologist' or 'clinical child psychologists'. Norwich (2005) suggested that if an 'educational psychology' model was followed the client ages would 'accordingly be life-long and the funding base would go beyond the school service' (p. 395). MacKay (2009) contends that work being conducted in Scotland into the provision of post-school psychological services (PSPS) represent 'a distinctive Scottish development which has no international parallel' (p. 8).

Other options for the future direction of educational psychology have been considered. Adelman and Taylor (2003) discussed how school psychology would fit within a public health framework. Some Educational Psychology Services are moving towards a community Educational Psychology Service (London Borough of Barking & Dagenham, 2009; Nottingham City Council, 2009). Stobie, Gemmell, Moran, and Randall (2002) agreed with the view that that there is a need for professional educational psychology to be reconstructed and believed there is a role for 'systemic' psychology, as opposed to a 'defunct traditional model'. They believe that case work extends the individualised problems of the child or young person and searches for contributing and change-promoting factors in the ecology where

it aims to improve matters for all children by intervening at accessible levels of the context from school to Local Authority policy development.

1.3.3   Professional Development In The Education Sector

The past 30 years have witnessed tremendous growth in training research, particularly so in the last decade. The professional development of teachers and educators is high on the agenda of government policies and these place great emphasis on improving the quality of teaching. There is now a wealth of research indicating that investing in teacher learning and professional development improves the quality of teaching. Cordingley, Bell and Rundell (2003) reviewed the literature on the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) of teachers and reported that CPD was linked with improvements in both teaching and learning; in addition, many of these improvements were substantial. Research on the impact of CPD in education has not been limited to teachers. Other studies have looked at the professional development of support staff. Models of professional development of school staff have been widely researched (Starkey *et al.*, 2009) and there have been numerous studies describing a range of initiatives in professional development to support school improvement (Van Kraayenoord, 2003). The different initiatives will be described in greater detail in the literature review, starting on page 11.

1.4 Rationale For This Study

My interest in the area of staff development comes from my time working for SFEC where I have been employed for a number of years. I have worked for the College for 8 years and during this time have seen many changes implemented. The College literature indicates that there has always been a strong learning culture and the training department offers a number of training programmes for staff. In addition, following an Ofsted inspection in

2002, the report found, 'teaching, residential and specialist staff are very well qualified in autism-related issues'. The College continues to promote an ethos of training and professional development, in order to provide high quality educational experience to enable learners to maximise their potential for future life, work and well-being.

As part of my own CPD I am currently working towards a Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology. During my training and reading around the literature I became increasingly interested in new directions and research into supporting staff in education.

There is growing recognition and compelling evidence, to suggest that staff need more than just content and knowledge to be effective. Kruger (1997) suggested that a person's attitude toward their problem solving skills might have a considerable impact on the problem being resolved successfully. The beliefs that staff hold regarding their capabilities have a powerful influence on their effectiveness (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). Despite numerous studies (Bambino, 2002; Hudson, 2002; Englert & Zhao, 2001, as cited in Van Kraayenoord, 2003; Vaughn, Hughes, Schumm, & Klinger, 1998; Voltz, 2001) investigating the different methods of supporting staff with their professional development and the effects of these initiatives, it became apparent that there has been very little work done in the post-school sector. This issue will be discussed in the literature review starting on page 11. As discussed previously, a large proportion of young people (77% at the end of 2006) will remain in education or training of some form after reaching statutory school-leaving age. High quality teaching would still be required in the post-school education sector, indicating a need for professional development. This is highlighted by the further education workforce reforms introduced in September 2007 in which the government pledged their commitment to a well-qualified and professional workforce across the FE sector, all learning providers not just FE colleges, in England (Department for Education and Skills, 2007, p. 4; DfES, 2007b, p. 4; Lifelong Learning UK, 2007b, p. 5). My literature search led me to the conclusion that very little research has been conducted in the post-school sector and, to my

knowledge at this time, no research in the post-school specialist sector. As the future of educational psychology continues to be debated amidst with education reforms, there is scope for Educational Psychology Services to expand into the post-16 education sector.

1.5 My View Of The World

The design of a research study begins with the selection of a topic and a paradigm. A paradigm, or a worldview, is a whole framework of beliefs, values and methods that guides research. Guba (1990) described a paradigm as 'a basic set of beliefs that guide action' (p. 17), or the 'basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator' (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 105).

Guba (1990) and Guba and Lincoln (1994) break down paradigms into three aspects, their ontology, epistemology and methodology:

- Ontology – basic assumptions about the nature of the world. For example, is there a real objective world out there, or is it constructed through human interaction?

- Epistemology – basic assumptions about what we can know about reality, and about the relationship between the researcher and what is known; a set assumptions about the relationship between the knower and the known (Harvard University, 2008). It asks the question, "How do we know what we know?" (Klenke, 2008).

- Methodology – how we may go about practically studying whatever we believe can be known.

Ontological assumptions affect epistemological assumptions, which in turn affect methodological assumptions. This is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Elements That Influence The Research Process

Ontological assumptions	What is the world / How the world is viewed
Epistemological assumptions	How knowledge is acquired or constructed / How can we know about the world
Methodology	Broad assumptions about how we go about researching
Methods	
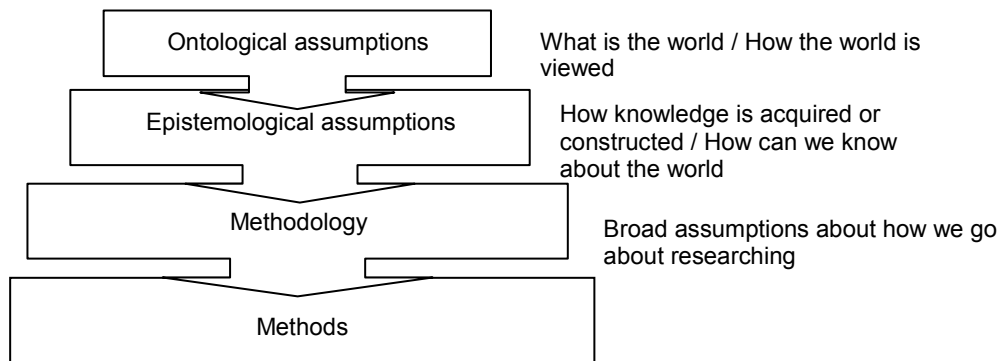
Whilst I believe that knowledge is constructed, I also believe that that things exist out there but as a human being my presence as a researcher influences what I am trying to study, an ontology known as critical realism, a post positivist philosophy (Trochim, 2006). Critical realism is drawn from the work of Roy Bhaskar (1979).

The critical realist is interested in how things work in the world and the world is regarded as a real 'something', the powers of which are able to be discovered (Schostak, 2002). A clear distinction is made between the natural sciences and social sciences. Critical realists believe that natural structures are open to a variety of forms of experimental and statistical analyses. Within the social sciences, it is not possible to isolate the one element being investigated and shut off those elements that are not being investigated. The researcher is a part of the world being investigated therefore the act of researching affects what is being researched. Furthermore social structures 'do not exist independently of the agents' conceptions of what they are doing in their activity' (Bhaskar, 1979); in other words social structures are open to an individual's interpretation of what is actually occurring.

Sayer (2000) posited that for realists, social science is neither nomothetic (that is law seeking) nor idiographic (concerned with documenting the unique). Whilst critical realists argue that there is a difference between the social sciences and the natural sciences, the social world cannot be studied using methods that have proven powerful in analysis, building theoretical explanations and predicting events in the world of natural objects. However,

(Byrne, 2002) argues this does not mean that all forms of measurement and mathematical or logical strategies should be excluded.

Critical realism acknowledges that our knowledge of the world is mediated by and constructed through language whilst maintaining that there are underlying structures and mechanisms which generate phenomena, versions of which we then construct through language (Willig, 2008). This is very much in common with constructionist approaches as the subjective element in knowledge production is recognised. As a critical realist acknowledges that we construct our view of the world based on our perceptions of it, it is also acknowledged that perception and observation is fallible. In other words, the critical realist is critical of our ability to know reality with certainty (Trochim, 2006) and acknowledges that there is a 'real', objective reality, but humans cannot know it for sure (Creswell, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

A methodology cannot be arbitrarily selected as each one brings with it epistemological and ontological assumptions. These have profound implications for research. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2005) suggest that the choice of problem, the formulation of questions to be answered, methodological concerns, the kind of data collected and the analysis will 'all be influenced or determined by the viewpoint held' (p. 8). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) suggest that individuals may also use multiple paradigms in their qualitative research that are compatible, such as constructionist and participatory worldviews. However Willig (2008) warns that although there is some flexibility in relation to our choice of methods, a researcher's epistemological and methodological commitments do constrain which methods can be used.

The research design was developed in response to my research questions, aims and objectives, and, I believe fits with my ontological and epistemological assumptions (Creswell, 2007; Crotty, 1998).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction To Chapter 2

In the early stages of the study I conducted a literature review as part of the research proposal submitted to the University for approval. In this chapter I will provide an overview of what I considered to be the main issues surrounding staff support groups. As with any research, this review of the literature is not by any means exhaustive on the topic of staff support groups. It is, however, an attempt to present to the reader the reasoning behind this study.

The literature search will be presented in two sections. The first part will outline the literature search before the research and intervention. The second part, starting on page 119, will look at the literature after the theory emerged from the data. The literature review has been presented in this manner as I adopted a Grounded Theory approach for this study. A full description of the rationale for choosing this approach is detailed in Chapter 4 starting on page 78.

The issue of when the literature review in a grounded theory study is conducted is of considerable debate in the research community (McGhee, Marland, & Atkinson, 2007; Wuest, 2007). To undertake an extensive review of literature before the data analysis and emergence of a core category

violates the basic premise of Grounded Theory in that the theory emerges from the data. It is argued that by restricting the review of the literature, this reduces the likelihood that the data will be manipulated to support existing theory and findings (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Glaser and Holton (2004) state that Grounded Theory methodology treats the literature as another source of data to be integrated into the constant comparative analysis process after the core category, its properties and related categories have emerged and the basic conceptual development is well underway. They go on to suggest that 'the pre study literature review of [qualitative data analysis] is a waste of time and a derailing of relevance for the GT Study' (Glaser & Holton, 2004, p. 12).

However, Strauss and Corbin (1990, 2008) comment on the advantages and disadvantages of an initial literature review and suggest that 'familiarity with relevant literature can enhance sensitivity to subtle nuances in data, just as it can block creativity' (p. 49). They point out that whilst there is no need to review all of the literature in the field beforehand they advocate reviewing the literature early in the study for several reasons:

- It stimulates theoretical sensitivity

- It provides a secondary source of data

- It stimulates questions

- It directs theoretical sampling

- It provides supplementary validity (Strauss & Corbin, 2008, pp. 49-52)

McGhee, Marland and Atkinson (2007) warn that an a priori conceptual framework should not be formed for the study and its focus should therefore be related to, but not grounded in, the initial literature review.

For this study, general reading of the literature was performed. This enabled me to approach the subject with some background knowledge and assisted me in formulating questions for initial interviews and observations (Cutcliffe, 2000; Strauss & Corbin, 2008). However, an extensive literature review was delayed. This helped ensure that data analysis was based in the data and that pre-existing constructs did not shape the subsequent theory formation.

Morse (2002) suggests that existing theoretical constructs can be used as a skeletal framework for research, to develop a tentative understanding of where to look for the phenomena. These theoretical constructs must be used with care so that they can inform, but not dictate, data analysis.

There is also another issue with regards to the literature review in Grounded Theory, which is determining when to conduct a subsequent review of the literature (Cutcliffe, 2000; Hunter, Hari, Egbu, & Kelly, 2005). Hutchinson (1993) contends that the researcher conducts a second review of the literature to link existing research and theory with the concepts, constructs and properties of the new theory.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) argue that selective sampling of the second body of literature should be woven into the emerging theory during the concept development stage. However, in contrast to these arguments, Glaser (1978) states that the researcher should refrain from accessing this second body of literature until the theory has emerged from the data.

This issue will be covered later, starting on page 78, when I explain the rationale for choosing the Strauss and Corbin Grounded Theory approach for this study.

2.2 Doing The Literature Review

To identify relevant studies, electronic bibliographic databases were searched using the content terms:

*professional development, education, teachers, teacher support groups, school staff, college staff, further education, post 16, self efficacy, work development groups, solution oriented work, possibility therapy.

All Psychology related databases were searched with these terms on Metalib (on the Newcastle University library website). In addition, the following databases were searched individually: PsycINFO, Web of Science, Medline, ERIC, and Scopus. Also, Educational Psychology, Educational Psychology in Practice, Educational Psychology Review, Teachers College Record online journals were searched (using the content search box) using the terms professional development, education, teachers, teacher support groups, self efficacy, teacher efficacy.

A search of an updated reference list was then conducted.

Titles and abstracts of identified records were screened to include and exclude studies according to the above criteria (if specified in sufficient detail). Full texts of remaining reports were reviewed and excluded at this stage if necessary.

In what follows, some to the cited literature may talk about teachers and staff in compulsory education; however, I believe the arguments are equally applicable in FE.

2.3 Review Of The Literature

2.3.1   Professional Development

The government committed to a qualified and professional workforce across the FE sector in England (Lifelong Learning UK, 2007a). In 2007 changes to the training and qualifications of all teachers, tutors, trainers, lecturers and instructors were introduced with reforms including Continuing Professional development requirements for all teachers ("The Further Education

Teachers' Continuing Professional Development and Registration (England) Regulations 2007," 2007). These regulations stipulate that:

> '*[Continuing Professional Development]*, in relation to a teacher, means *[…..]* any activity undertaken by him for the purposes of updating his knowledge of the subjects he teaches or developing his teaching skills'. (p.1)

Gray (2005) suggests that CPD embraces the idea that individuals aim to continually improve their professional skills and knowledge, beyond the basic training initially required to carry out the job. The Institute for Learning, the professional body for teaching practitioners in post-compulsory education and training, states that FE staff are required to participate in a number of professional development activities each year (Institute for Learning, 2009) and full-time teachers or trainers need to complete 30 hours each year of professional development ("The Further Education Teachers' Continuing Professional Development and Registration (England) Regulations 2007," 2007). With the increased recognition of the importance of professional development, there has been increased scrutiny and questioning of the effectiveness of all forms of professional development in education (Guskey, 1994).

The Institute for Learning (2009) suggests the following activities can be counted towards a teacher's professional development:

- Reading relevant journal articles or reviewing books

- Training courses or formal development or study

- Peer review, mentoring or shadowing

- Online learning including engagement in discussion forums and blogs

- Viewing and reviewing television programmes, documentaries and the internet

Professional development has more recently been characterised as a long-term process that extends from teacher education at university to in-service training at the workplace rather than the traditional short-term intervention (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Some agree that sustained longer term professional development programmes are more likely to have an impact, compared to shorter professional development activities, such as individual workshops and seminars, which are typically one-time events (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Harwell, 2003).

Eraut (1994) suggests that professionals continually learn on the job, as their work entails engagement in a succession of cases, problems or projects. However, Feiman-Nemser (2001) warns that professional development opportunities are usually 'sporadic and disconnected, rarely tied to teachers' classroom work and lacking any follow up' (p. 1014).

Joubert and Sutherland's (2008) literature review found that there was an increasing awareness that teacher learning takes place in a variety of settings. They drew attention to Ofsted's, the UK schools inspectorate, position that it is important that teachers have both on-site and off-site learning opportunities:

> 'the narrow perception that professional development always involves off-site activity, such as attendance at a course *[…..]* is gradually being replaced by a wider and more comprehensive view of CPD.' (Ofsted, 2002, p. 11).

Teachers encounter a range of activities that contribute to their professional development. Continuing Professional Development refers to both formally organised conferences, courses or educational events and work based learning (Eraut, 1994). These experiences can range from formal, structured learning opportunities to informal, learning activities (Desimone, 2009). Feiman-Nemser (2001) defines formal learning opportunities as structured learning environments, such as graduate courses or mandated staff development. In contrast informal learning opportunities are not restricted to

certain environments and can include individual activities such as reading books and classroom observations as well as collaborative activities such as conversations with colleagues, mentoring activities, teacher networks and study groups (Desimone, 2009).

The provision of professional development opportunities is typically seen by teachers to include whole school training days, team planning opportunities, joint teaching, peer observation, work shadowing, residential working groups, and local and national conferences and networks (Joubert & Sutherland, 2008). Most learning opportunities are likely to be formal professional development programmes which are frequently delivered by external experts and can be mandatory. It has been argued that professional development programmes that are mandatory or imposed on teachers are unlikely to succeed (Birman, Desimone, Porter, & Garet, 2000; Walen & Williams, 2000). Research indicates that teachers prefer informal, self-directed professional development compared to the formal, mandated initiatives and report greater positive impact on student learning (Kwakman, 2003).

In an effort to identify the elements of a successful professional development programme, researchers have generally looked for the 'one right answer', which is a major problem according to Guskey (1994). He goes on to suggest that programme effectiveness is generally judged by participants' satisfaction with the programme or a change in participants' professional knowledge base; rarely is change in professional practice considered.

Sabatini, Daniels, Ginsburg, Limeul, Russell, and Stites (2000) gathered teacher perspectives on the adult education profession and recommended that collaborative work with colleagues should be more widely utilised as a form of professional development. Teachers reported that they benefitted from peer learning in workshops as well as from engaging with their peers in other productive instructional activities.

2.3.2   Staff Support Groups

Applying problem solving skills to work-related problems is important (Kruger, 1997; Maher & Bennett, 1984). Most definitions of problem solving focus on a systematic process of intervening with an undesirable state of affairs (Bergan, 1977; Burke, Haworth, & Brantley, 1980; Jayanthi & Friend, 1992). Kruger (1997) argues that whilst problem solving skills are important, the mere mastery of skills of skills is not enough to resolve many work related problems and that a person's attitude toward their problem solving skills might have a considerable impact on the problem being resolved successfully.

Research by Kruger (1997) suggested there is a significant relationship between social support and self-efficacy in problem solving and reassurance of worth had a particularly strong relationship. When working with groups of teachers, a variety of models has been utilised. Farouk (2004) describes a group consultation approach based on the work of Hanko (1995, 1999) and Schein's (1988) process consultation method. This systemic and psychodynamic approach to group consultation, which is believed to be constructive and effective, encourages teachers to support each other both emotionally and professionally, with the EP acting as facilitator in this process.

Van Kraayenoord (2003) highlights a range of professional development initiatives related to school improvement. Examples include alliances between teachers and researchers through teacher-researcher professional development groups (Vaughn *et al.*, 1998) and collaborative communities (Englert & Zhao, 2001 as cited inVan Kraayenoord, 2003). Voltz (2001) describes professional development schools (PDS) as learning communities in which special educators are viewed as 'catalysts' in order to further the knowledge of both in-service and pre-service teachers. Other examples of teacher support groups are 'critical friend(s) groups' (Bambino, 2002; Hudson, 2002); and professional learning communities or networks of various types.

Gill and Monsen (1996) describe the development and implementation of 'The Staff Sharing Scheme' based on a problem analysis framework. This involves groups of teachers applying the framework to support each other within a group setting.

More recently, Jackson (2008) describes work discussion groups as being one of the most powerful models of learning, training and development that can be applied in almost any setting, and almost any worker. A key aim of the work discussion group is to create a forum where workers feel able to share their issues, concerns and preoccupations in an environment free from fear of exposure or possible criticism. These groups reportedly support teachers to increase capacity to manage the challenges of work, role and relationships with students by developing a deeper understanding about the meaning of behaviour, and the emotional factors that impact on teaching and learning. Jackson (2008) goes on to suggest that the successful implementation of a work discussion group requires the support of the headteacher or senior management and believe that the work discussion group is primarily a developmental opportunity.

Jackson (2008) suggests that work discussion groups can serve as a protective and preventative function for both students and staff. Jackson goes on to explain that the highly emotional nature when working with students, especially those with emotional and behavioural difficulties, can lead to potentially unhelpful relationships as the young person may become overly reliant on a member of staff, a view supported from my own experience and anecdotal evidence from colleagues. Jackson (2008) suggests that the most powerful benefit and outcome of work discussion is the sense of validation, being understood and accepted that is frequently reported by group members after having shared their concerns.

Marqueze, Voltz, Borges and Moreno (2008) highlight several studies which indicate that features of work such as lack of support, bureaucracy, insufficient time to carry out tasks and workload have negative effects on health. It has also been suggested that emotional exhaustion is strongly and

negatively related to access to resources and support (Sarmiento, Spence Laschinger, & Iwasiw, 2004). Sarmiento *et al* (2004) go on to suggest that higher levels of empowerment are associated with lower levels of burnout and greater job satisfaction.

Kutner, Sherman, Tibbets and Condelli (1997), evaluating professional development, suggested that professional networks were important in fostering change. These could be formal networks, for example, membership in a professional organisation or involvement in a teacher network focusing on specific subject matter, or informal groups, such as peer groups, study groups, collaboration of teachers, administrators, or non-instructional staff. The authors went on to propose that such structures supported dialogue and enhanced knowledge of pedagogy and subject-matter. Furthermore, in a collegial environment, they helped instructors seek solutions to problems related to their practice. In short, such structures foster a commitment to improvement (Kutner *et al.*, 1997). This viewpoint was echoed by other researchers, with the benefits of collaboration well documented in the literature (Martinho & Ponte, 2009).

Little (2002) suggests that when teachers collectively engage in questioning ineffective teaching routines, examining new ideas about teaching and learning, finding ways to acknowledge and respond to difference and conflict, and engage actively in supporting professional growth, conditions for improving teaching and learning are strengthened. Creese, Norwich and Daniels (1998) conducted a national survey on the prevalence and usefulness of collaborative teacher groups and found that schools that aimed to develop support structures that enabled professional interaction and knowledge sharing with colleagues were likely to have positive outcomes. Furthermore, such collaborative opportunities can help increase self-confidence, and reduce the feelings of isolation and impotence (Creese *et al.*, 1998; Martinho & Ponte, 2009) as well as promoting personal and professional development (Lafleur & MacFadden, 2001). However, Kapuscinski (1997) cautions that the benefits of collaboration for the individual and the group occur only over long periods of process and change.

2.3.3   Adult Learning Theories – A Brief Overview

There are many factors that can affect the implementation and effectiveness of any staff support group, training or intervention and a more comprehensive review could discuss this in detail.

One factor to be mindful of, as it contributes to effective staff development, is how and why adults learn. Knowles (1990) suggested that adults and children learn in different ways and as a consequence different theories and approaches have been developed. Butler (1992) suggests that a working understanding of the nature of learning is important. Smith (1984) suggests that learning can be used to describe several circumstances:

- When learning refers to a product: this relates to the acquisition of a particular set of skills or knowledge, the emphasis is on the outcome of an experience.

- When learning describes a process: this relates to how learners seek to meet needs and reach goals, the emphasis is on what happens when a learning experience takes place.

- When learning describes a function: this relates to how learners are motivated, what brings about change, the emphasis is on aspects believed to help produce learning.

Butler (1992) suggests that an effective staff development programme will address all three types of learning situations:

'Using knowledge about how learning is produced (function)
and about what happens when people learn (process),
participants in effective programs develop new knowledge and
skills as teachers and administrators (product).' (p. 2)

In a review of the literature on adult learning, which included the different types of adult theory, Butler (1992) identified a number of common descriptors for adult learners, shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Common Descriptors Of Adult Learners (Butler, 1992)

- Adults learn throughout their lives. Age does not reduce a person's ability to learn but may reduce the speed at which learning takes place.
- Adults exhibit a variety of learning styles, and there is no one 'right' way of learning.
- The adult learner is a person with a sense of self, bringing all previous life experiences, both personal and professional, to bear on new learning. Past experiences affect what the learner learns and are the foundation for current learning. Adults learn best when new learnings are demonstrably tied to or built upon past experiences.
- Adult learners' stages of development, whether personal (cognitive, moral, ego, conceptual), chronological (early adulthood, mid-life, etc.) or professional (new or experienced teacher, etc.), profoundly affect their learning.
- Adult learners exist in situations separate from the learning context. They are motivated to learn by changes in their situations and learn best when new learnings apply in practical ways and/or are relevant to the changes in their situations.
- The adult learner controls what is learned, selecting new information and/or deciding how to use it, and this takes place at both the conscious and unconscious levels.
- Adults tend to be problem-centred rather than subject-centred learners and learn best through practical applications of what they have learned.
- Adult learners must be treated as adults and respected as self-directed persons. They learn best in nonthreatening environments of trust and mutual respect.
- The optimum role of the adult learner in the learning situation is that of a self-directed, self-motivated manager of personal learning who collaborates as an active participant in the learning process and takes responsibility for learning.
- New learning is followed by a period of reflection to facilitate integration and application of new knowledge and skills.
- Continued learning depends on achieving satisfaction, especially in the sense of making progress toward learning goals that reflect the learner's own goals.

2.3.3.1 Andragogy

One of the best known theories of adult learning is andragogy. Knowles (1973) conceptualised his theory of adult learning more than three decades

ago. He contrasted the concept of andragogy, (andr - 'man'), 'the art and science of helping adults learn', with pedagogy, 'the art and science of helping children learn' (Knowles, 1980, p. 43). Andragogical theory was initially based on four main assumptions (numbers 2 – 5 below) that are different from pedagogy (Knowles, 1973). The fifth assumption was added later (Knowles, 1984), and assumption 1 was added more recently (Knowles, 1990). The six core assumptions or principles of andragogy are:

1. Need to know: Adult learners need to know why they are learning something before undertaking to learn it.

2. Learner self-concept: As a person matures, they move from dependency to self-directness and need to become responsible for their own decisions.

3. Role of experience: Adults draw upon the variety of their life experiences to aid their learning. These experiences are, however, filled with bias and presupposition.

4. Readiness to learn: Adults are ready to learn those things they need to know in order to cope effectively with life situations.

5. Orientation to learning: Adults are motivated to learn if they perceive that it will help them problem-solve and perform tasks they confront in their life situations.

6. Motivation: Adults respond to external motivators in varying degrees. The most potent motivators are internal factors, such as the desire for increased job satisfaction, self-esteem, quality of life, etc.

These six core assumptions fit within an andragogical model that Knowles (1984) suggests is a system of elements that can be adopted in whole or in part. It is not essential that this model is applied totally and without modification. Knowles stressed that an essential feature of andragogy is

flexibility and that the appropriate starting point and strategies for applying the andragogical model would depend on the situation (Knowles, 1984).

Figure 3: Andragogy In Practice (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005)
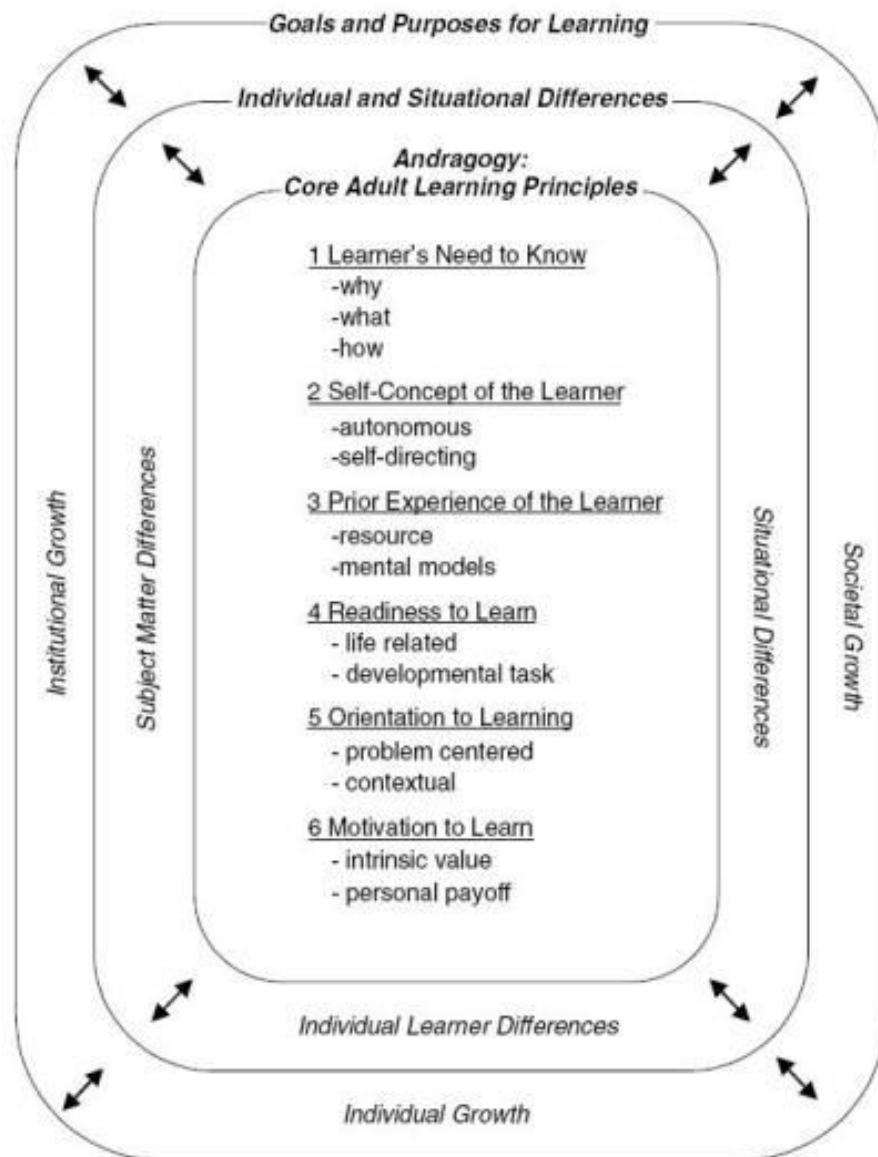
Figure 3 depicts the Andragogy in Practice framework (taken from Knowles *et al.*, 2005, p. 3). This is an enhanced conceptual framework that applies andragogy across multiple domains of adult learning practice (Knowles *et al.*, 2005). There are three dimensions to the framework, shown as rings in the figure, which are:

1. Goals and Purposes for Learning – developmental outcomes that serve to shape and mould the learning experience. Goals for adult learning events can fit into three categories: individual, institutional, or societal growth.

2. Individual and Situation Differences – variables or differences that impact on adult learning. These act as filters that shape the practice of andragogy. These variables are grouped into three categories: individual learner differences, subject matter differences, and situational differences.

3. Andragogy: Core Adult Learning principles - the core assumptions or principles of adult learning.

Knowles *et al* (2005) describe the framework as integrating additional influences to learning with the core adult learning principles. Furthermore, the model highlights the learning transaction as a multi-faceted activity and it is described as recognising the lack of homogeneity among learners and learning situations (Holton, Swanson, & Naquin, 2001).

2.3.3.2   *Transformational Learning Theory*

An alternative theory of how adults learn comes from Mezirow (1978). He developed the Transformational Learning Theory, a constructivist theory of adult learning (Mezirow, 1994) which is grounded in human communication (Taylor, 2008). Mezirow (1994) went on to describe it as an orientation which 'holds that the way learners interpret and reinterpret their sense experience is central to making meaning and hence learning' (p. 222).

Mezirow (1990) differentiates between two dimensions of 'making meaning'. 'Meaning perspectives' relates to a person's overall world-view, and 'meaning schemes' are smaller components which contain specific knowledge, values, and beliefs about a person's experiences. A number of meaning schemes

work together to generate a person's meaning perspective. These meaning perspectives act as filters that determine how an individual's life experiences are organised and interpreted.

Transformative learning is the process of effecting change in a frame of reference, the structures of assumptions through which people understand their experiences (Mezirow, 1997). The process of learning is defined as making a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of an experience and this in turn guides subsequent understanding, appreciation and action. It is 'the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action' (Mezirow, 1996, p. 162).

Central to Transformational Learning Theory is the role of critical reflection. Mezirow (1990) posits that reflection enables a person to correct distortions in their beliefs and errors in problem-solving. Critical reflection involves a critique of the presuppositions on which our beliefs have been built. Adults become critically reflective of the assumptions that are made by themselves or others when problems are solved instrumentally or when they are involved in communicative learning.

Adult learning, development and change come about when meaning schemes, smaller components of frames of reference, are transformed through critical reflection on experiences. Mezirow (1991) differentiated between three types of reflection:

- Content reflection – thinking about the actual experience itself;

- Process reflection – thinking about how to handle the experience;

- Premise reflection – examining long held, socially constructed assumptions, beliefs, and values about the experience or problem.

However, only premise reflection can lead to transformative learning (Merriam, 2004).

Mezirow (1997) suggests that there are four ways to learn:

1. Refining or elaborating our meaning schemes (existing frames of reference).

2. Learning new meaning schemes (new frames of reference).

3. Transforming meaning schemes (habits of mind).

4. Transforming meaning perspectives (points of view).

Transformation of meaning perspectives is less common than the transformation of meaning schemes. Mezirow (1997) suggests that transformative learning does not occur if new material or experiences fit comfortably within existing frames of reference. Taylor (1998) reports that transformative learning takes place when a learner experiences a radically different and incongruent situation that cannot be assimilated into their meaning perspective.

Parallels can be drawn between Mezirow's concept of incongruent situation and assimilation and Piaget's learning model and his concept of assimilation and disequilibration. Furthermore, Mezirow's transformation of a meaning perspective is a similar concept to Piaget's accommodation.

Mezirow (1991) identified 10 phases of the transformative learning process and argued that transformations often follow some variation as meaning became clarified:

1. A disorienting dilemma.

2. Self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame.

3. A critical assessment of assumptions.

4. Recognition that one's discontent and process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change.

5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions.

6. Planning of a course of action.

7. Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans.

8. Provisionally trying out new roles.

9. Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships.

10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective.

According to Mezirow (1997), the role of the educator is:

- To help the learner focus on and examine the assumptions underlying their beliefs, feelings and actions.

- To assess the consequences of these assumptions.

- To identify and explore alternative sets of assumptions.

- To test the validity of assumptions through effective participation in reflective dialogue.

If this theory was applied to a staff support group, the role of the EP would be to encourage participants to examine their personal assumptions, explore other possibilities and test all for validity. Change would come from

examination and new idea formulation, which could be made possible through reflective discussion with colleagues.

2.3.3.3 Experiential Learning Theory

One further theory of adult learning is that of Experiential Learning (Kolb, 1984). Much of the work into experiential learning stems from the work of Kolb and this theory emphasises the role that 'experience plays in the learning process' (Kolb, 1984, p. 20). Kolb stresses that it is this emphasis that distinguishes itself from other learning theories.

Experiential Learning Theory defines learning as:

> '*[.....]* the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience.' (Kolb, 1984, p. 41).

Experiential Learning Theory draws on the work of a number of scholars who believed that central to their theories of human learning and development was the role of experience (Kolb & Kolb, 2005b). This theory is based on six principles:

- Learning is a process, not an outcome – to improve learning the primary focus should be on engaging learners in a process that best enhances their learning.

- All learning is relearning – learning is best facilitated by a process that draws out the learner's beliefs and ideas about a topic so that they can be examined, tested, and integrated with new, more refined ideas.

- Learning requires an individual to resolve dialectically opposed modes of adaptation - conflict, differences, and disagreement drive the

learning process. The learner moves back and forth between opposing modes of reflection and action and feeling and thinking.

- Learning is a holistic integrative process – learning involves the integrated functioning of the person as a whole – thinking, feeling, perceiving, and behaving.

- Learning requires the interplay between a person and the environment – learning occurs through the processes of assimilating new experiences into existing concepts and accommodating existing concepts to new experience.

- Learning is the process of knowledge creation - a constructivist theory of learning is proposed, whereby social knowledge is created and recreated in the personal knowledge of the learner.

Kolb and Fry (1975) developed an experiential learning model (see Figure 4) which is a continuous spiral process which consists of four basic elements. The learning model portrays two dialectically related modes of grasping experience, concrete experience and abstract conceptualisation, and two dialectically related modes of transforming experience, reflective observation and active experimentation (Mainemelis, Boyatzis, & Kolb, 2002). The first stage of the learning process is concrete experience and this relates to a person or learner carrying out a particular action and then seeing the effect of the action in this situation. The second stage, observation and reflection relates to the person or learner consciously reflecting back on that experience. The third stage, forming abstract concepts, relates to the person or learner attempting to conceptualise a theory or model of what they observed. The fourth and final stage, testing in new situations, or active experimentation, relates to the person or learner planning how to test a model or theory or planning for a forthcoming experience.

Figure 4: Experiential Learning Model
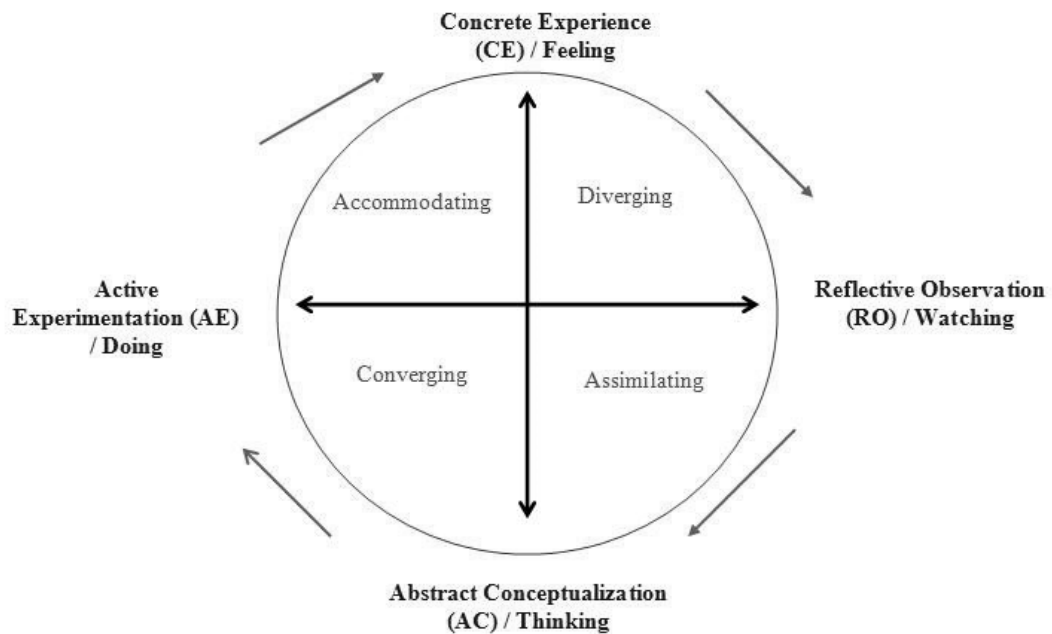
Kolb and Fry (1975) contend that immediate or concrete experiences are the basis for observation and reflection. These reflections are then assimilated and distilled into abstract concepts from which new implications for action can be drawn. They suggested that the adult learner can enter the process at any one of the stages but must follow each stage in the sequence. For effective learning to take place four different abilities must be possessed for each stage of the process, which are concrete experience abilities, reflective observation abilities, abstract conceptualisation abilities, active experimentation abilities.

Kolb acknowledged that not everyone will possess all these skills; therefore he suggested that a learner develops a strength in, or orientation to, one of the poles of each dimension. From this, Kolb (1984) identified four learning styles which correspond to each stage and these highlight conditions under which learners learn better. The four learning styles are shown in Table 1 with a brief description of each.

Table 1: The Four Learning Styles Identified By Kolb (2005a; 1984)

Learning Style	Learning Characteristic	Description
• Accommodator	• Concrete experience & active experimentation	• Greatest strength is doing things • More of a risk taker • Performs well when required to react to immediate circumstances • Solves problems intuitively
• Diverger	• Concrete experience & reflective observation	• Strong in imaginative ability • Good at generating ideas and seeing things from different Perspectives • Interested in people • Broad cultural interests
• Assimilator	• Abstract conceptualisation & reflective observation	• Strong ability to create theoretical models • Excels in inductive reasoning • Concerned with abstract concepts rather than people
• Converger	• Abstract conceptualisation & active experimentation	• Strong in practical application of ideas • Can focus on hypo-deductive reasoning on specific problems • Unemotional • Has narrow interests

Mainemelis, Boyatzis and Kolb (2002) suggest that a person whose learning style is stronger in conceptualisation has more developed analytic skills, those whose learning style is stronger in experiencing has higher levels of development in interpersonal skills.

2.3.4   Learning In The Workplace

The recognition that learning occurs within the workplace and that it is necessary for the development of working knowledge and skills is not new

(Lee *et al.*, 2004). Workplace learning is seen as a flexible form of learning and it enables employees to engage in regular continuing professional development (Reeve & Gallacher, 1999). Workplace learning is therefore often seen as being, and promoted as, advantageous for both employers and employees (Lee *et al.*, 2004).

Eraut and Hirsch (2007) suggest that there are four main sets of factors which are most relevant to learning in the workplace. The key aspects are shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Key Aspects Of Workplace Learning (Eraut & Hirsch, 2007)
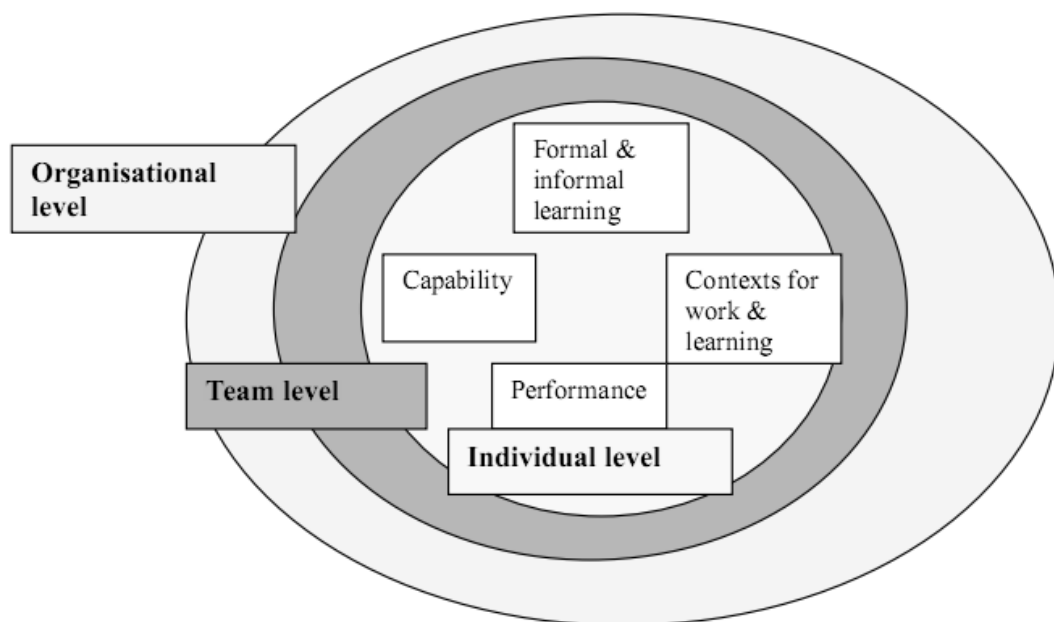
At an individual level (the inner ring) these factors can be described as the capabilities of an individual including personal attributes, skills, knowledge, experience, and understanding. Another factor at the individual level is the person's performance at work and how this is perceived by others and themselves. A third individual factor relates to the formal and informal learning which takes place for that individual and the processes by which this happens. The final factor relates to the context in which the individual is working and learning. This could be the job and its wider context, such as the workplace culture and social interactions as well as more formal

management processes. Eraut and Hirsch (2007) stress that these factors always affect each other.

Eraut and Hirsch (2007) contend that the model is replicated at the team or workgroup level and at an organisational level. The learning model is dynamic and responds to the changes at an organisational, individual and environmental level.

Eraut (2007) and Eraut, Alderton, Cole and Senker (2000) assert that the majority of employees' learning occurs in the workplace itself and can occur in a variety of ways, most notably as formal and informal workplace learning (Silverman, 2003). Formal workplace learning is typically associated with training and education and only provides a small part of what is learned at work (Eraut, 1998). In contrast, informal workplace learning can be thought of as a learning process that takes place in everyday work experience (Silverman, 2003). It represents one of the most predominant forms of learning and whilst research suggests that as much as 75 percent of all workplace learning may be informal (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007) only 20 percent of what organisations invest in learning is dedicated to enhancing informal learning (Cross, 2007). Several research projects conducted by Eraut (2004a) focused on the workplace learning of a variety of professionals, technicians and managers; some focused on learning during their first years of employment, some on mid-career learning. In all cases the majority of the learning in the workplace itself was informal, and involved 'a combination of learning from other people and learning from personal experience, often both together' (Eraut, 2004a, p. 248).

Whilst formal learning contributes most when it is relevant and well-timed, it still requires further workplace learning before it can be used to best effect (Eraut, 2007). Eraut (1998) suggests that informal learning naturally occurs from the demands and challenges of work, such as solving problems, improving quality and/or productivity, or coping with change, and from social interactions with colleagues and clients. Eraut (2004a) contends that responding to such challenges involves both working and learning.

Informal learning has increasingly been used in adult education. Eraut (2004a) suggests that it can provide greater flexibility or freedom for learners. Whilst informal learning recognises the social significance of learning from other people, it does not go so far as socialisation; there is still scope for individual agency. Eraut acknowledged that such learning can take place in a much wider variety of settings than formal education or training. He further argued that it can also be considered a 'complementary partner to learning from experience, which is usually construed more in terms of personal than interpersonal learning' (Eraut, 2004a, p. 247).

Research into the workplace learning led to Eraut and colleagues (Eraut, 2007; Eraut *et al.*, 2005) to classify learning processes according to whether their principal object was working or learning. Processes in the first column of Table 2 were judged to be working processes with learning as a by-product. These processes were reported to account for a very high proportion of the learning of the participants in Eraut *et al's* (2005) study. The prevalence and the quality of the relationships in the workplace has an impact on their success, therefore the amount of learning reported varied significantly with person and context.

The nine processes in the third column were identified as learning processes. These are listed in terms of their proximity to the workplace. This locates supervision, coaching and mentoring at or very near the learner's normal workplace; shadowing and visiting other sites are usually in other people's workplaces; conferences, short courses and working for qualifications are usually not in workplace settings; and independent study can be conducted almost anywhere that is quiet.

The central column identifies activities that were judged to occur in both working and learning processes. These nine learning activities were judged to be embedded within most of the work processes and learning processes described above, but were also found in short opportunistic episodes. The key issues for learning are the frequency and quality of their use.

Table 2: Forms Of Workplace Learning (adapted from Eraut, 2007)

Work processes with learning as a by-product	Learning Activities located within work or learning processes	Learning processes at or near the workplace
• Participation in group processes • Working alongside others • Consultation • Tackling challenging tasks and roles • Problem solving • Trying things out • Consolidating, extending and refining skills • Working with clients	• Asking questions • Getting information • Locating resource people • Listening and observing • Reflecting • Learning from mistakes • Giving and receiving feedback • Use of mediating artefacts	• Being supervised • Being mentored • Being coached • Shadowing • Visiting other sites • Conferences • Short courses • Working for a qualification • Independent study

Further to the research, Eraut (2007) highlighted that the majority of learning opportunities in the workplace can be informal learning activities.

A number of studies have identified a range of factors that support workplace learning (Doornbos, Bolhuis, & Simons, 2004; Ellinger, 2005; Eraut, 2007; Eraut & Hirsch, 2007; Eraut *et al.*, 2005; Silverman, 2003):

- Support and feedback - these are critically important for learning, retention and commitment. The openness and accessibility of colleagues, such as being able to approach others, enhances the informal learning process. As well as supportive relationships, a sense of being a valued member of staff needs to be fostered.

- Enhancing workplace learning – increasing opportunities to consult with and work alongside others in teams or temporary groups can enhance the quantity and quality of learning. Care must be taken over the allocation and structuring of appropriate work as being over-

challenged or under-challenged can be detrimental to learning and bad for morale. By encouraging employees to be proactive, creative and reflective about their learning, workplace learning can be enhanced.

- The manager's role – the beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of the manager are crucial as they can have a significant influence on workplace learning and culture. They have an important role in developing a culture of mutual support and learning between colleagues. Leaders and managers who do not support learning inhibit it.

- The knowledge required – leaders, managers and employees should have an awareness of the range of ways through which people can learn in the workplace, and to recognise the factors which enhance or hinder individual or group learning. Supervision to discuss learning needs in the context of performance and progress is also needed.

Eraut's concept of the different types of workplace learning can be applied to the Professional Development Groups that were conducted as part of this research. Processes from column one and two, illustrated in Table 2, can be demonstrated when participants attended the monthly meetings, such as participation in group processes, problem solving, asking questions and reflecting.

2.3.5   Transfer Of Skills From Training

Transfer of training generally relates to adult education, vocational or professional training or workplace education. It is defined as the degree to which learners effectively apply knowledge, skills, and attitudes developed during training (Newstrom, 1984; Wexley & Latham, 1991). Transfer of training is argued to be a key concept in adult learning theories as most education and training aspires to transfer; the end goals of training and education are not achieved unless transfer occurs (Subedi, 2004). It is

widely acknowledged that transforming knowledge and skills learned in formal situations so that it becomes usable in practice is not straightforward and the transfer is very difficult in complex situations, such as teaching (Joubert & Sutherland, 2008). Eraut (2009) contends that the majority of taught components of professional and vocational education are intended for future use at work, however, the evidence that this happens as intended is 'often disappointing' (p. 13).

Subedi (2004) argues that transfer does not just happen but requires the implementation of carefully planned strategies to facilitate transfer of training. Just as important is that the barriers to transfer of training is recognised and minimised. Such barriers include, insufficient instructional time; curriculum or instructional materials that are not relevant to job in which the skills and knowledge will be applied; and lack of support or opportunities for reinforcement (Carman, DeOnna, Toso, & Van Horn, 2006). Eraut (2004b) identified five stages through which transfer of learning occurs:

1. The extraction of potentially relevant knowledge from the context(s) of its acquisition and previous use;

2. Understanding the new situation, a process that often depends on informal social learning;

3. Recognising what knowledge and skills are relevant;

4. Transforming them to fit the new situation;

5. Integrating them with other knowledge and skills in order to think / act / communicate in the new situation.

The transfer of training is a complex process that involves multiple variables (Clarke, 2002). Learning and retention (training outputs), and generalisation and maintenance (conditions of transfer) are affected by the learner's ability, personality and motivation (trainee characteristics), the principles of learning, sequencing, training content (training design), and the support and the

opportunity to use the learned skills (work environment) (Baldwin & Ford, 1988).

Further to this, Cheng and Ho (2001) identified nine factors that are relevant to the transfer process, which are categorised into three variables:

- Individual variables: locus of control and self-efficacy.

- Motivational variables: career/job attitudes, organisational commitment, and decision/reaction to training, post training interventions.

- Environmental variables: supports within the organisation, continuous learning culture, and task constraints.

Eraut (2007) suggests that the transfer of knowledge between formal learning situations and everyday practice is difficult to achieve. The transfer of training is often hindered by the coping routines teachers develop in the workplace and these routines can be resistant to change.

2.3.6   *Communities Of Practice*

The term 'Communities of Practice' was first used in 1991 by Lave and Wenger to introduce the notion of legitimate peripheral participation, the process whereby 'newcomers become part of a community of practice' (p. 29) and move towards full participation. Communities of Practice are groups of people who share an interest, a craft, and/or a profession. It is in the process of sharing information and experiences in that group that the members learn from each other, and have an opportunity to develop themselves personally and professionally (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This concept was extended by Wenger (1998) who applied it to other domains, such as organisations.

Wenger (1998) contended that learning could be the reason the community comes together or learning could be an incidental outcome of members' interactions with others.

There are three required components that make up a Community of Practice and it is the combination of these three elements that constitutes a Community of Practice (Wenger, 1998). A community is cultivated by developing these three elements in parallel:

- There needs to be a **domain**. A Community of Practice has an identity defined by a shared domain of interest (e.g. radiologists, middle school history teachers, FE tutors etc.); it's not just a network of people or club of friends. Membership implies a commitment to the domain.

- There needs to be a **community**. Members of a specific domain interact and engage in shared activities, help each other, and share information with each other. Relationships are built that enable them to learn from each other. There needs to be people who interact and learn together though members do not necessarily work together on a daily basis, but they meet because they find value in their interactions.

- There needs to be a **practice**: The members are practitioners and not just people who have an interest in something (e.g. sports or agriculture practices). They develop a shared repertoire of resources which can include stories, helpful tools, experiences, ways of handling typical problems, etc. This kind of interaction needs to be developed over time. Informal conversations held by people of the same profession, such as office assistants, graduate students or teachers, help people share and develop a set of cases and stories that can become a shared repertoire for their practice.

Whilst the concept of a Community of Practice originated in industry, it has found a number of practical applications in business, organisational design,

government, education, professional associations, development projects, and civic life (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). The label Communities of Practice is not used universally in all organisations. They are known under various names, such as learning networks or thematic groups.

Within education the first applications of Communities of Practice have been in teacher training and in enabling isolated educators access to colleagues and there has been great interest in these peer-to-peer professional-development activities (Wenger *et al.*, 2002).

Wenger (1998) suggests that learning is central to identity. A primary focus of this is learning as 'social participation'. Participation relates to being active participants in the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to these communities (Wenger, 1998). As they spend time together participants of the Community of Practice typically share information, insight and advice, and help each other solve problems. They ponder common issues, explore ideas and act as sounding boards. Tools, standards, generic designs, manuals and other documents may be created. Through continually engaging in and contributing to the practices of the community to which they belong, a shared identity is created and the motivation to become a more central participant in a community of practice can be a powerful incentive for learning.

However, Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) contend that not everything we know can be codified as documents or tools, and knowledge is tacit as well as explicit. They suggest that the tacit, or unspoken, aspects of knowledge are often the most valuable. And only through informal learning processes such as storytelling, conversation, coaching and apprenticeship, which Communities of Practice provide, can tacit knowledge be shared.

It is argued that over time a Community of Practice develops a common body of knowledge, practices, and approaches (Wenger *et al.*, 2002). 'A primary task of a Community of Practice is to establish this common baseline and standardise what is understood so that people can focus their creative

energies on more advanced issues' (Wenger *et al.*, 2002, p. 11). Furthermore, the benefits of this interaction within the Community of Practice helps members manage information overload, get knowledgeable feedback on new ideas and keep abreast of leading thoughts, techniques and tools.

2.3.7   Self-Efficacy

The topic of self-efficacy is too vast to cover therefore I will discuss what I believe to be relevant to this research.

The construct of self-efficacy was first introduced by Bandura in 1977 with the publication of 'Self-efficacy: toward a unifying theory of behavioral change.' Self-efficacy is the 'belief in one's capabilities to organise and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments' (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). He went on to posit that personal efficacy is the key factor of human agency (acts done intentionally). If people believe that they have no power to produce results, they will not attempt to make things happen.

Bandura (1986) viewed human functioning as the product of a dynamic interplay of personal, behavioural, and environmental influences. The concept of self-efficacy is based on the triadic reciprocality model that symbolises a relationship between: (a) personal factors (such as cognitive, affective, and biological events), (b) behaviour, and (c) environmental factors (see Figure 6).

Henson (2001a) suggests that the reciprocal nature between these symbiotic influences results in actual behaviour and thought in the individual. Relating this model to the Professional Development Group, the supportive nature of the meetings (environmental factors), the thoughts and feelings that college staff have regarding the difficult situations they face when working with students (personal factors), and how they may go about supporting students

(behaviour) all impact on the staff member's judgment about whether they will be able to execute the actions (self-efficacy).

Figure 6: Triadic Reciprocality - Three-Way Interaction Between Behaviour, Personal Factors, And Environmental Factors
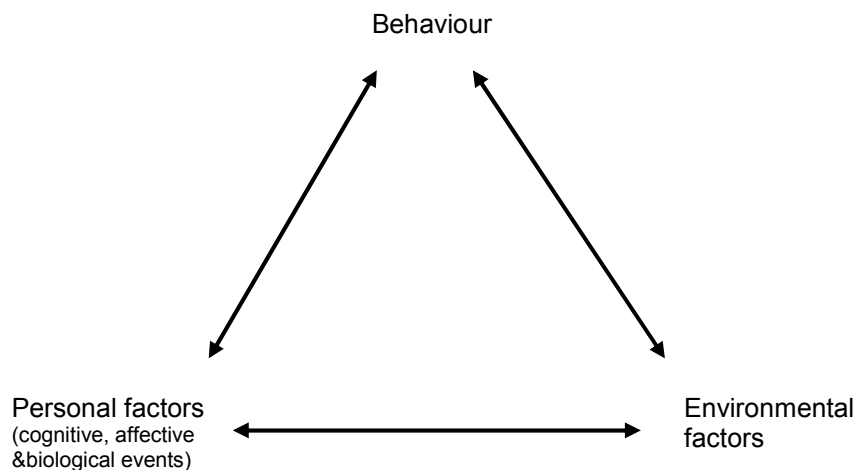
Bandura (1997) describes three levels of self-efficacy:

- Task specific – the most common and widely researched (Maurer, 2001) and related to performance of a specific task

- Domain – is more general and relates to performance within an entire definable domain of tasks

- General – relates to a person's overall self-confidence for dealing with multiple domains of life.

A person's efficacy beliefs are said to influence a number of areas, such as courses of action, effort, perseverance in the face of obstacles and failures, resilience to adversity, whether thought patterns are self-hindering or self-aiding, stress and depression in taxing situations and level of accomplishment realised (Bandura, 1997).

2.3.7.1 Teacher Efficacy

Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) defined teacher efficacy as a teacher's 'judgment of his or her capabilities to bring about desired outcomes of student engagement and learning' (p. 783) claiming that teachers need more than content and pedagogy knowledge in order to be effective. Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy and Hoy (1998) suggest there is compelling evidence that indicates the beliefs that teachers hold regarding their teaching capabilities have a powerful influence on their teaching effectiveness.

Within SFEC, college staff, including managers, tutors, LSAs, administrative and ancillary staff, are required to work with students across a variety of settings and situations. I believe that the level of efficacy needed to perform across various settings falls within the domain level.

Bandura (1982) identified four key antecedents that influence self-efficacy:

- Enactive mastery – this relates to repeated performance accomplishments.

- Vicarious experience – the modelling of skills may be beneficial, though slightly less influential.

- Verbal persuasion – aimed at convincing a person of their capability to perform a task (Gist, 1987).

- Emotional / physiological arousal – relates to an individual's perceptions of their physiological state which may be used in assessing performance ability.

Efficacy information picked up from any source, and of whatever type, is not inherently enlightening (Bandura, 1996). Efficacy information will only become instructive through cognitive processing, in which the information is 'selected, weighted and integrated into self-efficacy judgements' (Bandura, 1997, p. 79).

Bandura (1996) considers that the cognitive processing of efficacy information involves two distinct functions. The first function (selection) is concerned with the types of information people attend to and use as indicators of personal efficacy, which are specific for each of the four sources of efficacy information; the second function is concerned with the rules people use to integrate efficacy information from different sources when forming personal efficacy beliefs.

Whilst much has been written about the relationship of teacher's efficacy beliefs, student motivation and achievement, Labone (2004) suggests that less is known about the sources of teachers' self-efficacy beliefs.

Bandura (1997) proposed that self-efficacy beliefs are context-specific rather than a generalised expectancy. From a review of the literature Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2007) identified a number of context-specific factors that appear to promote a stronger sense of self-efficacy. Environmental factors, such as a positive school atmosphere and a sense of community helped foster efficacy. Receiving positive feedback on teacher performance, collaboration with other teachers, parental involvement in the school and school-wide coordination of student behaviour were significantly associated with teachers' sense of efficacy.

Organisational features such as a culture with a strong academic focus, principals or headteachers who were responsive to teachers' concerns and encouraged them to try new ideas, and supportive colleagues who encouraged one another in their attempts to address student needs are also said to be related to teachers' efficacy beliefs.

Schools with strong leadership, whereby the headteacher inspired a common sense of purpose among teachers, student disorder was kept to a minimum, resources were available and teachers were given flexibility over classroom affairs were schools in which teachers felt a greater sense of efficacy.

Higher levels of collective efficacy are also associated with higher levels of teacher self-efficacy and higher student achievement (Goddard & Goddard, 2001; Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2000).

In contrast to the factors that promote self-efficacy, research indicates that a number of factors appear to diminish teachers' sense of efficacy. These include excessive role demands, poor morale, lack of recognition, inadequate salaries, and low status. In addition professional isolation, uncertainty, and alienation tended to weaken teachers' self-efficacy beliefs (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007).

A difficult or unresolved issue surrounding teacher efficacy is the issue of transfer and the extent to which efficacy in one context or subject area transfers to other situations. Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy and Hoy (1998) identified that when teachers attempt to implement new practices, their efficacy beliefs may decrease initially but then rebound to a higher level when the new strategies are found to be effective. They concluded that encouragement and support are particularly important during periods of change and temporary dips in efficacy occur. 'Teachers need support and training to see them through the initial slump in efficacy beliefs as they attempt to implement new methods' (Tschannen-Moran *et al.*, 1998, p. 238).

The proposed Professional Development Group would create opportunities to increase vicarious experience, social persuasion and performance feedback to support efficacy beliefs. The positive effects of vicarious experiences and verbal persuasions are likely to be pronounced, because fellow teachers can provide compelling models and credible sources of feedback. (Tschannen-Moran *et al.*, 1998).

2.3.8   Solution-Oriented Approaches

Solution-Oriented approaches have their origins in individual, person centred therapeutic approaches. This approach, developed by O'Hanlon and Weiner-Davis (1989) derives its therapeutic rationale from three sources: the methodologies that had been developed by Milton Erikson starting in the 1930's, Solution-Focused Brief Therapy developed by de Shazer and his colleagues (1985, 1988, 1991, 1994), and the strategic intervention techniques developed at the MRI (The Mental Research Institute) Brief Therapy Center in California.

After reviewing the literature, it appears that Solution-Focused and Solution-Oriented are used interchangeably. Whilst Solution-Oriented therapy, is akin to Solution-Focused therapy, developed by de Shazer and his colleagues, O'Hanlon (2007) points out that one feature that distinguishes Solution-Focused (Brief) therapy and Solution-Oriented therapy, which he refers to as 'Possibility Therapy', is validation of the client's emotion, which reflects the early influence of Carl Rogers. In Solution-Focused Brief Therapy the emphasis is so much on 'solution talk', O'Hanlon claims the client may feel that the therapist is minimising or not attending to the problem. In contrast, the major first step in Solution-Oriented Therapy is hearing, acknowledging and validating the client's experience as it lays the foundation for subsequent work.

Solution-Oriented approaches and principles have gradually developed in many areas of professional practice. It is still used as a therapeutic approach but is also now widely used in the fields of social work, education and business. Within education its application has been across a wide range of contexts including individual work, mentoring and coaching, classroom management, developing leadership, team building, development planning and supporting organisational change. The Scottish government has recognised the benefits of working in this way and provided training to local authorities in 2008 in working towards Solution-Oriented Children's Services (Cairns, 2009; Education Scotland, n.d).

Figure 7: Solution-Oriented Principles (O'Hanlon & Weiner-Davis, 1989; Rees, 2008)

- If it works, do more of it; if it doesn't work do something different.
- A small change in any aspect of a problem can initiate a solution – by just changing one thing we can make a difference & this can lead to a solution and to more widespread change. The mistake many of us make is to want to change too much & expect results too quickly.
- People have the necessary resources to make change possible – by identifying the exceptions and using our skills we can begin to see ways forwards. We should not always consider the problem as beyond our control, if we contribute a small change we can start the ball rolling. We should also acknowledge that we cannot always make a difference to all aspects of a problem.
- A focus on future possibilities and solutions enhances change – thinking about what is possible gives people a more positive outlook, not a defeatist one. It can be just as important to shift people's perspectives about a problem.
- No sign-up, no change – it is important to get key people to own the changes they need to make too. You also need commitment to the process
- Co-operation enhances change – work with others don't expect to do it all yourself. Think about getting others on board as opposed to thinking you are the expert. Remember other people will have skills to bring to the solution. Working on your own means a single voice, less resources & less likelihood of change.
- The problem is the problem, not the person or the organisation – distance the problem from the people or organisation and focus on what can be done about the problem, eg: don't bemoan that your university is hopeless when it comes to equality issues or that 'academics' never turn up for disability training events. Think about how the problem can be solved, when do academics turn up, what works, how can we do more of that?
- Possibilities are infinite: negative and positive possibilities coexist. This principle calls for the acknowledgement of the former and promotion of the latter.
- People have unique solutions to their problems: the principle encourages curiosity and an interest in ideas and ways of moving forward. It's about respecting people's thoughts and how change could happen, rather than any pre-planned notion being provided for them. Problems – don't assume someone else's way is the best or even that your way is the best. Use different approaches
- Keep one foot in the pain and one in possibility: this refers to the professional balance we must maintain that allows us to accommodate the positives and negatives.
- Use language that is more likely to lead to change – use positive, change enhancing terminology, not that which anchors people in problems and issues.

Solution-Oriented approaches concur with the constructivist view that there is no single correct view of reality (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008) and follow the principles listed in Figure 7. Rees (2008) contends that Solution-Oriented principles reflect the fact that the approach is 'broad based, enveloping and inclusive, culturally sensitive, non-technical, humanistic and embraces of all that works' (p. 170).

It is argued that the approach pays less attention to technique and asking specific questions compared to Solution-Focused working (O'Hanlon, 2000; Rees, 2008).

O'Hanlon (2007) describes the Solution-Focused approach as more formulaic as it invariably asks certain questions, notably the miracle question and follows certain sequences. The Solution-Oriented approach is described as being a more flexible method of working (O'Hanlon, 2007). Another feature of a Solution-Oriented approach is that it seeks to embrace the problem narrative or concern as a potentially important part of the change process (O'Hanlon, 2007; Rees, 2008; Rees, 2006), whereas, traditionally, the Solution-Focused model considers this to be less important and there is little significant discussion of the validation of emotions. Solution-Focused approaches centre on finding and creating solutions to a problem as the belief is that change can result entirely from building upon competence and spends little time on the problem itself, however this has begun to change in recent times (O'Hanlon, 2007).

Whilst there has been a vast amount of literature on teacher support groups, at present, articles that describe the use solution-oriented approaches in a support group for staff in post-compulsory education have yet to be located despite a comprehensive search of the literature.

2.4 Where Is The Gap In The Literature?

Guishard reported in 2000 about work being carried out in the London Borough of Lambeth Educational Psychology Service expanding their range of provision to the FE sector. It is telling that, despite this paper being written over a decade ago, there appears to have been very little further research into this area. MacKay and Hellier (2009) reported that the provision of post school Educational Psychology Services is a new field of practice. It is worth

noting, however, educational psychologists have worked within post-16 provision since the early 1990's, but this work is sparse.

As stated previously, there is very little research into the use of teacher support in post-compulsory education that adopts a solution oriented approach. Most of the studies I located appeared to use a Solution-Focused approach; however, my interest lies within the Solution-Oriented approaches as there is the opportunity to consider the problem and not just focus on solutions.

The main issue in writing the research question in a grounded theory study is the need to be explicit about the research questions early on in the study. It can be argued that when preparing for submissions to research review committees either for thesis work or when applying for grants, the committee needs to be convinced that the researcher is capable of undertaking the intended research project (Kilbourn, 2006).

The normal starting point for research is to use the literature and findings from previous research to decide what to investigate and how (Denscombe, 2007). However, as a grounded theory study is typically data driven and therefore emergent, the research questions may be evasive early on in the study. Research questions in qualitative studies tend to be broad but not so broad to give rise to unlimited possibilities (Strauss & Corbin, 2008) and they may change several times during data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2007). Strauss and Corbin suggest:

> 'The initial questions or area for observation are based on concepts derived from literature or experience. Since these concepts *[.....]* do not yet have proven theoretical relevance to the evolving theory, they must be considered provisional. Nevertheless, they provide a beginning focus, a place for the researcher to start.' (1990, p. 180)

2.5 Research Questions

The primary research question for this study is:

- **What is the perception of college staff, working in a specialist Further Education College, of their experiences following participation in a Professional Development Group?**

Additional key questions:

- Does participating in the meetings support staff in their professional development and working practice?

- What is the nature of the impact?

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction To Chapter 3

In this chapter I shall outline the research design, describe the research methods and data collection.

As discussed previously, critical realists argue that we use 'causal language' to describe the world and assume that there is a real world out there (Easton, 2009). Harvey (1990) argues that the aim of a critical methodology is 'to provide knowledge which engages the prevailing social structures' (p. 2).

Sayer (2000) suggests that in contrast to positivism and interpretivism, critical realism is compatible with a relatively wide range of research methods, though the choice of research method should depend on nature of the object of study and what is to be learned from it. Similarly, Willig (2008) suggests that there are no 'right' or 'wrong' methods to data generation. Instead methods of data collection can be more or less appropriate depending on the research question.

However, critical realists argue that methods that are used to analyse, build theoretical explanations and predict events in the natural sciences cannot be used to study the social world. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) suggest that 'human situations and human beings are too complex to be captured by a

static one dimensional instrument' (p. 24). Dowson and McInerney (2003) support this view by suggesting that quantitative research techniques oversimplify the complex and dynamic role played by motivation beliefs, including self-efficacy, and by multiple contexts.

3.2 Role Of The Researcher

Critical realists suggest that the researcher is part of the world being studied. Therefore the act of researching will affect what is being researched and its results change the social world (Schostak, 2002).

In this study, my role as the practitioner-researcher was to facilitate the Professional Development Groups; more detail about the role of the facilitator can be found in the data collection section. Following the intervention, I then conducted semi-structured interviews with focus groups to gather participants' view of the process, and the effects of the process. I was fully aware throughout the whole process that my interactions were likely to have some influence on the outcomes of the research.

It is acknowledged that the dual role of the researcher can raise issues when conducting research in the workplace. Robson (2002) describes a practitioner-researcher as 'someone who holds down a job in some particular area and is, at the same time, involved with carrying out systematic enquiry which is of relevance to the job' (p. 446). The practitioner-researcher may, because of their dual role, face particular ethical challenges. It is suggested that the practitioner-researcher must be mindful that certain ethical principles may be compromised due to their dual role (Dooner, Mandzuk, & Clifton, 2008). Their guidelines suggest that the practitioner-researcher:

- must be acutely sensitive to the potential for a conflict of interest on the part of the researcher,

- be mindful of the potential vulnerability of participants and whether they feel obligated to participate in the research,

- ensure that consent is fully informed.

Therefore, it is important for the researcher to consider their role in the research, and to demonstrate how they would eliminate the possibility of participant coercion. How I addressed these issues is detailed in section 3.8 on page 63.

The two roles of practitioner and researcher are not always easy to combine (The Open University, n.d). Robson (2002) lists some advantages and disadvantages of conducting research within the workplace, which include 'insider' issues. An advantage of being an insider is that the researcher would have a pre-existing knowledge and experience base about the situation and the people involved which reduces the possibility of the researcher experiencing any 'culture shock or disorientation' (Hockey, 1993, p. 119). It might be assumed that the researcher will understand and appreciate the context in a way that an outsider researcher would not; the insights and sensitivities to things that are said and unsaid. It can be argued that a greater level of candour may be generated as the insider researcher may have more credibility and rapport with the participants (Mercer, 2007): 'someone considered empathetic' (Hockey, 1993, p. 199).

However, Hockey (1993) warns against the risk of 'taken-for-granted assumptions' remaining unchallenged. As an 'insider' this pre-existing knowledge could lead to pre-conceptions about issues and/or solutions. Shah (2004) also argues that participants may not share certain information with an insider for fear of being judged. Hierarchy issues could also arise from insider research (Robson, 2002). In this instance, participants may see the researcher as a member of the college's psychology team, someone to whom referrals regarding individual students are made, and thus may see any professional from the multi-disciplinary team as a person with "the answers". During the process I was mindful of my prior relationship with the

college staff team in that students are typically referred to the psychology team when there are issues/concerns. During the Professional Development Group meetings, I was careful not to be drawn into discussions where participants were attempting to seek solutions from me as a member of the psychology team. During the initial meetings I was keen to highlight my role in the Professional Development Group meetings was to help facilitate a dialogue between the group members and for them to discuss possible solutions/strategies.

During the Professional Development Group meetings it was noted that there were occasions when a member of staff would ask or direct a question towards me, or when discussing strategies, it would be difficult to refrain from entering into a lengthy discussion rather invite the other participants to talk about how they had dealt with a similar situation.

3.3 Research Design

Snape and Spencer (2003) argue that there is no single, accepted way of doing qualitative research. How it is conducted depends upon a range of factors including:

- The researcher's beliefs about the nature of the social world and what can be known about it (ontology).

- The nature of knowledge and how it can be acquired (epistemology).

- The purpose and goals of the research, the characteristics of the research participants.

- The audience for the research.

- The position and environment of the researchers themselves.

Creswell (2007) defined qualitative research as an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a 'complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants and conducts the study in a natural setting' (p249).

This study was initially interested in looking at the effects of a Professional Development Group on staff and one of the elements being investigated was whether there were any changes in reported self-efficacy of staff following the intervention. Bandura (1986) suggested that self-efficacy is, in part, socially constructed. As such it is affected by people's interpretations, and not something that can be directly observed. It is reliant on people's accounts of what is occurring, which is subjective and open to individual interpretation. In this research, I became, in effect, a participant and my actions and thoughts influenced by what was being researched and how I interpreted the data that I collected. As the research progressed, the focus changed and I became less interested in the impact on perceived self-efficacy and more interested in the views and perceptions of the participants in relation to participating in a Professional Development Group. However, it is usual for research questions in qualitative studies to change as the research progresses and this did not change my data collection methods or analysis. This also highlights the need for an additional literature search to be conducted following data analysis. A full rationale for this is covered in section 5.2 starting on page 119.

Scammell (2010) suggests that the explicit recognition of theoretical perspectives can help a researcher check and control potential biases when interpreting the data. Reflexivity and bracketing are forms of self-reflection practised by qualitative researchers and the evaluation of their roles in unintentionally tainting or manipulating data (Finlay, 2002; Patton, 2002).

Hardy, Phillips and Clegg (2001) suggest that reflexivity involves reflecting on the way in which research is conducted and understanding how the research process shapes its outcomes. Willig (2008) suggests that reflexivity requires

an awareness of the researcher's contribution to the construction of meanings throughout the research process, and an acknowledgment of the impossibility of remaining outside of the subject matter whilst conducting the research. Reflexivity, urges us 'to explore the ways in which a researcher's involvement with a particular study influences, acts upon and informs such research' (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999, p. 228).

Cresswell (2003) suggests that the qualitative researcher systematically reflects on who they are in the inquiry and is sensitive to their personal biography and how it shapes the study. This introspection and acknowledgement of biases, values and interests (or reflexivity) typifies qualitative research.

Two types of reflexivity are described by Willig (2008); personal and epistemological. 'Personal reflexivity' involves reflecting on the ways in which a researcher's values, experiences, interests, beliefs, political commitments, wider aims in life and social identities have shaped the research. Furthermore, it also involves thinking about how the research may affect and possibly change us, as people and as researchers. 'Epistemological reflexivity requires the researcher to engage with questions such as, how has the research question defined and limited what can be 'found'? How has the design of the study and the method of analysis 'constructed' the data and the findings? How could the research question have been investigated differently? To what extent would this have given rise to a different understanding of the phenomenon under investigation? Thus, epistemological reflexivity encourages the researcher to reflect upon the assumptions (about the world, about knowledge) that have been made during the course of the research, and it helps the researcher to think about the implications of such assumptions for the research and its findings (Willig, 2008).

Fischer (2009) describes bracketing as typically referring to the researcher identifying their vested interests, personal experience, cultural factors, assumptions, and hunches that could influence how they view the data from

the study. In order to view the data freshly, these involvements are placed in 'brackets' and 'shelved' for the time being as much as is possible, or the suspension of presuppositions (Ashworth, 1999). Ahern (1999) suggests that bracketing and reflexivity are 'fruit from the same tree' (p. 410). A researcher must be reflexive in order to bracket, and both activities require time to reflect, an environment of support, and reflective skill (Paterson & Groening, 1996).

Robson (2002) suggests that within the realist framework it is the theory rather than the data or data collection that is central to explaining reality. Anastas (2004) suggests that qualitative research has key characteristics primarily related to the way in which the research is conducted and less so by the data being collected as text rather than in numerical form. Padgett (1998) suggests that qualitative research is distinguished by its 'recursiveness and flexibility' (p. 28). The research questions drive the design of the study and, as these questions are linked to theory, a critical realist view is compatible with flexible design research, or with the use of qualitative data. Robson (2002) suggests that qualitative research methods can show substantial flexibility in their research design, typically anticipating that the design will emerge and develop during data collection.

It can be argued that flexible or qualitative methods acknowledge the relationship between the researcher and the participants (Anastas & MacDonald, 1994). Qualitative methods allow greater spontaneity and adaptation of the interaction between the researcher and the participants. Furthermore, the relationship is often less formal than in quantitative research (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005). However, Anastas and MacDonald (1994) contend that the findings of flexible method research can be seen as no more or less legitimate than those of any other type of study and all any study can do is to approximate knowledge of the phenomena as they exist in the real world.

Qualitative research methods are designed to help researchers understand people and the social and cultural contexts within which they live. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe qualitative research as:

> 'A situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretative, material practices that makes the world visible *[.....]*. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them' (p3).

Qualitative research projects are guided by one or more research questions which are open-ended; questions that cannot be answered with a simple yes or no. This is in contrast to hypotheses that are claims, derived from existing theory that can be tested against empirical evidence. Qualitative research questions identify the phenomenon that the researcher wants to investigate; they ask what, how and why something happens. The qualitative research question is usually provisional as the researcher may find the concepts and terminology used in the research question are not appropriate or relevant to the participants' experiences. Therefore, qualitative research is open to the possibility that the research question may change during the research process (Creswell, 2003). Willig (2008) suggests that, from a pragmatic point of view, the aim of research is to generate understanding that will be useful to us, and not to gain access to an abstract truth independent of human experience.

York (1998) suggests that qualitative methods are more suitable for research when a researcher is 'seeking to develop theories or hypotheses'; when a researcher is 'seeking an understanding of the subjective meaning of behaviours or social processes'; when 'the concepts of interest are not easily reduced to categories or numbers'; or when 'there is relatively little that is known about the subject of study' (p. 23).

Qualitative research also tends to be associated with small scale studies due to the strong tendency for qualitative research to be relatively focused and to involve relatively few people (Denscombe, 2007).

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of a Professional Development Group on staff at a specialist further education college. One way to investigate this was to explore the participants' views and opinions following participation in such a Professional Development Group.

3.4 Context And Location For The Study

This study was conducted at a Specialist Further Education College in the North East of England offering provision for young adults with an Autism Spectrum Condition, referred to "SFEC" throughout the study.

After the initial meetings with managers and staff to discuss the purpose and function of the Professional Development Group, monthly meetings were arranged for 2 separate groups of staff to attend. Each meeting lasted an hour held at SFEC after the college day between 4 – 5 pm to minimise disruption to the college timetable and sessions.

3.5 Participants

A purposive sample of 13 staff was used. A purposive sample is a non-representative subset of a larger population and is constructed to serve a very specific need or purpose. Its selection is based on the researcher's interest (Robson, 2002). The sample was composed of a range of new and experienced tutors and learning support staff. All worked with and supported students whose difficulties lie on the autism spectrum.

Staff were recruited to the study after college managers had identified that they were interested in arranging some training with the aim of developing staff skills. College staff were invited to attend an initial meeting to discuss the purpose and function of the Professional Development Groups. A mix of tutors and LSAs who had either recently joined the staff team or who had been with SFEC for a number of years attended the meeting (See Appendix 2 for brief staff profiles).

A copy of the amended Teacher Efficacy Scale (see Appendix 3) with information and request for consent (see Appendix 4 & 5) were sent to the rest of the staff team not participating in the Professional Development Group to ensure that the participants were not particularly different, in terms of their self-efficacy views, to the rest of the staff team. Details of the instrument used in this study can be found in section 3.6.1 on page 62.

3.6 Measures Of Self-Efficacy – An Introduction

There are a number of instruments that claim to measure self-efficacy. However, Bandura warns:

> 'There is no all-purpose measure of perceived self-efficacy. The "one-measure-fits-all" approach usually has limited explanatory and predictive value because most of the items in an all-purpose measure may have little or no relevance to the selected domain of functioning *[…..]*. Scales of perceived self-efficacy must be tailored to the particular domains of functioning that are the object of interest.' (Cited in T. Urdan & F. Pajares (Eds.), 2006 page 307).

Bandura and Adams (1977) emphasised that behaviour must be measured precisely in the analysis of efficacy and that measures should be tailored to that domain.

One widely used measure teacher self-efficacy is the Teacher Efficacy Scale (TES) developed by Gibson and Dembo (1984) who claimed it was designed to take a sample from four broad areas said to play important roles in teacher effectiveness: alignment, inclusivity, organization, and efficacy (Gibson & Dembo, 1984). However, the validity of the measure has been called into question. Henson (2002) reported that the scores from Gibson and Dembo's (1984) original validation study were psychometrically weak and the construct validation of the TES questionable.

3.6.1   Measures Used In The Current Study

Concerns with the Gibson and Dembo instrument led to the creation of a number of new teacher self-efficacy measures (Henson, 2001a, 2001b; Klassen *et al.*, 2009). Examples of such measures have been developed by Brouwers and Tomic (1999), Schwarzer, Schmitz, and Daytner (1999), Goddard, Hoy, and Hoy (2000), Riggs and Enochs (1990), Caprara, Barbaranelli, Steca, and Malone (2006).

One measure that has been widely used is the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES), developed by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001).

The TSES (see Appendix 6) is a 24 item measure of teacher efficacy based on Bandura's unpublished Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (Henson, 2001b). The instrument assesses teacher competence and task demands in particular teaching contexts (Yeo, Ang, Chong, Huan, & Quek, 2008). The TSES comprises three factors of teacher efficacy, which are Instructional Strategies, Classroom Management, and Student Engagement (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Items are rated on a 9-point likert scale with anchors at 1 (nothing), 3 (very little), 5 (some influence), 7 (quite a bit), and 9 (a great deal). Examples of items include: "How well can you implement alternative strategies in your classroom?" (Instructional Strategies); "How much can you do to control disruptive behaviour in the classroom?"

(Classroom Management); "How much can you do to help your students value learning" (Student Engagement). Higher scores on each subscale indicate a greater sense of teacher efficacy in the factor being measured.

Validity and reliability data for this instrument were taken from three separate studies, by consulting with a large number of trainee and practising teachers to identify key areas, by conducting factor analysis several times, and by correlating the measure with other teacher self-efficacy measures (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). The authors suggest that the measure has a unified and stable factor structure and that it assesses a broad range of capabilities that teachers consider important to good teaching. Since then, the instrument has been widely used and shown to be a reliable measurement across five different countries (Klassen et al., 2009).

For this study, an amended version of the TSES was used to measure staff self-efficacy. See Appendix 3 for a copy of the instrument used. The amendments made to the TSES consisted of changing some of wording to make it more applicable to a college setting, for example, school was changed to college. Consent was obtained from the authors of the TSES prior to any amendments being made.

As the research process progressed, the focus changed and I became less interested in the impact on perceived self-efficacy and more interested in the views and perceptions of the participants. Whilst it had been my intention to use the information gathered from the use of the Teacher Efficacy Scale, I felt that it no longer fit with the aim of the research and have therefore omitted any data from this.

3.8 Ethics

The domains of respect, competence, responsibility and integrity as set out in The British Psychological Society's (2006) Code of Ethics and Conduct were adhered to throughout the research process of this study.

Elmes, Kantowitz and Roediger (2006) outlined some general principles governing the conduct of research with human participants. These are summarised in Table 3 on page 66 with a brief description of how I addressed these issues.

In addition to the above ethical considerations, the dual role of the researcher can raise issues when conducting research in the workplace. It has also been suggested that researchers must consider the advantages and disadvantages of using a population with whom they have a prior (and on-going) relationship, particularly if there is an unequal relationship. Such issues also arise when researchers are engaged in research in their own workplace. (University of Manitoba, 2006).

Dooner, Mandzuk and Clifton (2008) suggest that the practitioner-researcher must be mindful of several issues and I will address these below:

- the practitioner-researcher must be acutely sensitive to the potential for a conflict of interest on the part of the researcher – my role within the college often means that staff will generally refer individuals to the psychology department when there are issues/concerns. Prior to the research, I was particularly mindful not to engage in conversations where staff were seeking 'answers' from a psychologist but encourage staff to share experiences and potential solutions/strategies.

- be mindful of the potential vulnerability of participants and if they feel obligated to participate in the research. Whilst it was convenient, in terms of gaining access to a readily available pool of research participants, to conduct my research in the workplace, I was mindful that the participants might feel an element of coercion in their participation in the research, particularly as my role could be seen to be a more senior position. During my initial meetings with College managers and then with potential participants to discuss my research, I was keen to highlight that this was completely voluntary and they were free to withdraw at any point. I was initially unsure whether this

would be enough to allay any 'fears' or obligation to participate; however, one member of staff withdrew from the study after participating in two sessions.

- ensure that consent is fully informed – during the initial meeting with College staff, when written consent was obtained, the nature and purpose of the study was explained.

3.9 Limitations

The sampling procedures used were not intended to provide a nationally representative sample of all staff working in education. The sampling design intentionally targeted individuals working in a specific post-16 educational environment.

3.10   Research Measures and Data Collection

The following is an overview of the research methods used to collect data in this study and a description of the rationale for choosing each measure, its purpose and content.

Table 3: Ethical Considerations When Conducting Research

• Ethical Consideration	• Recommendation by (Elmes *et al.*, 2006)	• What I did
• Informed consent and deception	• Participants should be fully informed of all aspects of the research, including what they will be asked to do, which may influence willingness to participate. Any aspects of the research that may have detrimental effects should be made known. • Deception should only be used if there is no other way to answer the research question and the potential benefit of the research far outweighs any risk to the participants	• During the initial meeting with College staff, when the nature and purpose of the study was explained, written consent was obtained (see Appendix 7 Information for Participants). Participants were given ample opportunity to understand the nature, purpose, and anticipated consequences and benefits of research participation, so that they could give informed consent. • College staff were informed that their participation in the training sessions (Professional Development Group meetings) could also be recorded as part of their CPD, thus there was no deception.
• Freedom to withdraw	• Participants should feel free to withdraw from the study at any time without fear of penalty.	• Participants were informed that participation in the study was voluntary and they could withdraw at any time for any reason, and without need for explanation.
• Protection from harm and debriefing • • •	• Participants should have a way of contacting the researcher following participation. This enables participants to seek help or advice from the researcher should problems arise. • Following data collection, the researcher should provide detailed debriefing in which they explain the general purposes of the research. Participants should have access to publications arising from the study.	• Participants were debriefed at the end of the research and they were given contact details if they wanted further information. • During the final evaluation session, participants were reminded of the aim of the research and that they could have access to the final paper if they so wanted.

• Removing harmful consequences	• The researcher has a responsibility for removing harmful consequences as a result of participating in the research, particularly if it is a risky project/study	• Participants were given the opportunity to discuss any issues that arose from their participation in the study on an individual basis
• Confidentiality	• Information about participants collected during the course of the study should be kept confidential. •	• Participants were reminded of confidentiality during the Professional Development Group meetings. Any data collected was be anonymised and cannot be identified as theirs. • Assurances were made that every effort would be made to safeguard any data collected, hard copies of data were stored in a locked cabinet that only I had access to and any electronic data was password coded.

3.10.1 Stage 1 – Initial Meetings

During a consultation meeting, college managers identified that they were interested in arranging some training with the aim of developing staff skills. The aim and the process of the Professional Development Group was explained to the managers who subsequently discussed this with the staff team in one of the weekly staff meetings. College managers explained that if any members of staff were interested in participating in the research they were invited to attend an initial meeting with me to discuss the purpose and function of the Professional Development Groups. College managers also spoke individually to specific members of staff, whom they felt would be interested and may benefit from taking part in the research.

I then met with senior teaching staff of SEFC to discuss issues that college staff approached managers with when working with students; handwritten notes of the meeting were taken.

I then met with 2 groups of potential participants for an initial meeting. It was identified that college staff had undergone a lot of training and they could benefit from further opportunities to embed these skills into their working practice. In particular, a number of staff had received training in using Solution-Focused techniques and the Professional Development Groups meetings would be using a Solution-Oriented approach. However, it was highlighted that the primary purpose of the Professional Development Group would be supportive in nature.

Ethical considerations were taken into account (see section 3.8 on page 63 for details). It was stressed that participation in the research was entirely voluntary. It was explained that should staff wish to participate in the research and attend the Professional Development Group meetings the time spent attending meetings would count towards their CPD hours.

Participants were then given a copy of the Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES), which I had amended for use in a college setting. Prior consent was

obtained from the authors of this instrument for any amendments to be made. After participants completed the questionnaire a brief discussion followed outlining the format of the Professional Development Group meetings. It was explained that the format of the meetings would be modelled on an approach outlined by Farouk (2004) and a solution-oriented approach would be adopted. Table 4 on page 74 details the process that was explained to college staff.

It is worth noting that the format of the meetings was explained verbally to participants and, in hindsight, they may have benefitted from this information being given in written format.

A copy of the amended TSES was also given to college staff who were not taking part in the Professional Development Groups. This was to ensure that the participants were not particularly different to the rest of the College staff team in terms of reported self-efficacy. The comparison between the participant group and the non-participant group entailed looking at the means of the items rather than conducting a full-scale factor analysis that Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) suggest. Should there have been a significant difference between the participant and non-participant groups, efforts would have been made to recruit further participants to the study. However, given the pragmatic nature of the research process, should this had not been possible, the research would have continued with the participants that had been recruited and the difference between the two groups would have been acknowledged.

As stated previously, as the research progressed the focus of the study moved away from the self-efficacy beliefs of the staff team towards the views and perceptions of the participants in relation to participating in a Professional Development Group.

Monthly Professional Development Group meetings were arranged for two separate groups of staff to attend. Each meeting lasted one hour and was

held at SFEC after the college day, between 4 – 5 pm to minimise disruption to the College timetable.

3.10.2 Stage 2 – Implementation Of The Professional Development Groups

Much has been written about working with groups of teachers and a variety of different models of working have been utilised.

Hanko (1995, 1999) has been influential in the development of staff support groups in schools. This consultation approach has its roots in psychodynamics. During the group consultation sessions, teachers were encouraged to look for contextual and systemic factors that influence a child's behaviour and not just to focus on within child factors or the influence of the home environment. The purpose and focus of the meetings was to share knowledge, restore objectivity, share skills, restore confidence, tailor a curriculum to individual needs and enlist parents as partners (Hanko, 1995). In this context, the group of colleagues acted as a resource for the individual teacher, and in acting as a consultative tool helped the teacher presenting the issue to become aware of the emotional and social factors that influenced the situation.

Schein (1988) developed the process consultation method which is a systemic and psychodynamic approach to group consultation. Schein (1999) describes ten principles that guide the process consultation approach. These principles are:

1. Always try to be helpful.

2. Always stay in touch with the current reality.

3. Access your ignorance.

4. Everything you do is an intervention.

5. It is the client who owns the problem and the solution.

6. Go with the flow.

7. Timing is crucial.

8. Be constructively opportunistic with confrontational interventions.

9. Everything is a source of date; errors are inevitable – learn from them.

10. When in doubt share the problem.

Schein's approach focuses on problem-solving within the group without necessarily focusing on one particular member of the group. The process consultation approach does not provide solutions or answers and the group has ownership of the problem; it is responsible for resolutions.   Schein (1988) defined the role of the facilitator's as assisting the group in operating effectively and working with processes to enable the group to reach desired outcomes. The EP can take on the role of facilitator in this process.

Work carried out by Stringer, Stow, Hibbert, Powell and Louw (1992) established teacher support groups based Hanko's group consultation approach. Within the consultation meetings, a problem management framework was used, which is summarised below:

- Welcome and reminder of ground rules

- Members state what they aim to give to the session

- Feedback on concerns previously shared

- Concerns/issues are invited and prioritised

- Brief outline of the priority concern

- Questions asked by the group to elaborate the concern

- Facilitator guides the process to ensure the group does not rush into providing solutions and advice

- Consultee summarises the discussion and what they consider they are able to go and do next

- Process review

Gill and Monsen (1996) developed and implemented the "Staff Sharing Scheme" based on a 'problem analysis framework'. This consultation model consists of five steps, which is described in detail in Gill and Monsen's (1996) paper. This involved groups of teachers applying the framework to support each other within a group setting.

Jackson (2002, 2005, 2008) describes the development of 'work discussion groups' in school settings. The aim of the groups was not to take up the role of the 'expert' or to 'tell' the teachers how to do their work but to offer them some alternative ways of thinking and managing themselves with less distress thus enabling them to function more effectively (Jackson, 2005). An important role of the facilitator, and the group, is to help the member of staff presenting the issue unpack their concern in sufficient depth and breadth so that it can be thought about productively. Jackson (2008) describes the process of 'unpacking' as a vital part of developing reflective capacities.

The process used in the research Professional Development Group meetings was modelled on the process consultation approach detailed by Farouk (2004). Farouk's approach is based on the work of Hanko (1995, 1999), and Table 4 outlines the process.

Farouk's model is based predominantly on systemic thinking, and a psychodynamic approach. In this model, Farouk encourages the use of solution focused questions in relation to the current issue but does not

involve problem-free talk, or the creation of future problem-free scenarios, as would be the case in a purely solution-focused approach (Durrant, 1995; Rhodes & Ajmal, 1995).

In this current study, whilst the stages were modelled on Farouk's approach, a solution-oriented approach was adopted. I wanted to participants to have the opportunity to consider the problem and not just focus on the solutions. In solution-oriented work, there is an emphasis on the importance of felt experience and points of view (O'Hanlon, 2007). It also enabled the other members of the group including me as the facilitator to listen for 'exceptions'[1] during the discussion of the issue. The importance of validating people's emotions was highlighted and not just the focus on finding solutions. It was hoped that it would be a very fluid way of working and not appear too formulaic.

At the beginning of the first Professional Development Group meeting, participants were briefly reminded of confidentiality issues and the format of the sessions.

Participants were invited to talk about an issue that they wanted to discuss. One member of staff described a situation that they faced, college staff were encouraged not to ask any questions until the staff member had told their story. Then other participants were encouraged to ask questions to clarify the situation.

Prior to the meetings I was highly aware that some support might be needed to maintain the focus of the conversation on the issue and not to discuss issues that they had no control over.

Each Professional Development Group meeting was recorded and listened to repeatedly to inform the questions to be asked in the focus groups. The recorded conversations were also be used to inform the discussion section of this study and give specific examples of the theories that emerged.

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1 Exceptions are times when, in similar circumstances, problems could have happened but did not.

Table 4: The Process Used In The Professional Development Group Meetings (modelled on Farouk, 2004)

The process	Role of group members	The most relevant process functions that the facilitator may adopt
1. Description and clarification phase. The member of staff presenting the concern talks about his/her situation freely, while other members of the group only ask clarification questions	• To engage in active listening and only asking clarification questions	• Initiating • Modelling • Active listening • Promote information seeking • Gatekeeping
2. Reflection phase. The member of staff presenting the concern is asked questions and other group members may give examples of similar experiences	• To ask questions and given examples that facilitate refection by group members • Not to offer advice or solutions	• Initiating • Modelling • Clarifying • Promote information giving • Elaborating • Gatekeeping and encouraging
3. Personal theory generating phase. Group members (including the member of staff presenting the concern) put forward their personal theories	• To put forward their personal theories (possibly supported by examples) as to what is underlying the area of concern	• Initiating • Opinion seeking • Clarifying • Elaborating • Gatekeeping and encouraging • Harmonising and compromising • Summarising and consensus testing
4. Strategy generating phase The final phase consists of the group making suggestions, that the member of staff presenting the concern may or may not take up	• To suggest and discuss possible ways forward and recommend strategies that can be implemented	• Initiating • Clarifying • Elaborating • Gatekeeping and encouraging • Harmonising and compromising • Summarising and consensus testing

3.10.3 Stage 3 – Evaluation Of Meetings Using Focus Groups

Qualitative data can be collected via various methods. The aim of this study was to elicit the views of college staff regarding the impact of a Professional Development Group. Two methods of gathering this data could be one-on-one interviews or focus groups.

One-on-one interviews have various benefits. For example, the format enables the researcher to gain rich data from the participant; people may be inclined to share more in a one-on one situation and it can be easier to analyse the data from one-on-one interviews (Greenbaum, 2000). However, the validity of individual interviews has been called into question. The one-on-one environment can put pressure on the participant to answer the questions put before them, in a group situation there is less pressure on the participant therefore any contrived or possibly misleading comments are reduced. It has also been argued that the relative costs of focus groups are less than that of individual interviews.

Other forms of data collection can be found in the appendix (see Appendix 8) but for the purposes of this study this section will detail the use of focus groups in research.

Focus groups have emerged as a standard collection technique in recent years (Willig, 2008). Greenbaum (2000) suggests that focus groups hold some major advantages over one-on-one interviews, one being that individual interviews do not have the benefits of group dynamics.

Krueger and Casey (2000) describe the focus group as a special type of group in terms of purpose, size, composition, and procedures. Focus groups are a method developed to explore people's beliefs, attitudes and opinions. The aim of a focus group is to listen and gather information as a way of understanding how people think or feel about a particular issue.

Six to eight people are selected to become participants as they possess certain characteristics that relate to the topic of the focus group. Focus groups enable participants to share ideas with peers so that arguments around a topic can be built; there is also the issue of safety in numbers particularly when discussing sensitive issues. The role of the researcher is to try and create a permissive environment in the focus group that nurtures different perceptions and points of view, without pressuring participants to reach consensus. Typically the group discussion is carried out several times with similar types of participants to identify trends and patterns in perceptions. A careful and systematic analysis of the discussions can provide clues and insights as to how a product, service, or opportunity is perceived.

Following the meetings, I arranged to meet with staff participating in the research to evaluate the process and implementation of the Professional Development Group. For this study, two focus groups were set up to gather the views and opinions of participants with regard to participating in a Professional Development Group. I felt that it would enable staff to share ideas and viewpoints, and as a result a richer conversation would occur, compared to individual interviews.

Due to job commitments, not all participants were able to attend the focus group interviews. Whilst these participants were given the opportunity to individually discuss their experiences at a later date, they would not have benefitted from the group dynamics (Greenbaum, 2000). Another implication is that their views may not have been represented by the rest of the focus group.

Open and flexible questioning was used during the focus group meetings, though a discussion guide was prepared in advance. The guide provided a framework, so that specific issues were discussed. There were only a few items contained in the discussion guide, but, it served to keep the discussion focused. Open-ended questions also enabled participants to tell their story in

their own words and add details that might have resulted in unanticipated findings.

During the course of the focus group, it was noted that one particular member of staff felt uncomfortable discussing their views with the rest of the group. In keeping with the ethical considerations when conducting research, as outlined in Table 3 on page 66, I arranged to meet with this participant at a later date to discuss any issues that arose from participating in this research. This served as a debriefing opportunity but also to inform the implications for any future Professional Development Groups.

The main data for this current study are the notes made during interviews with College managers and transcribed interviews. Audio recordings were made of both the focus group interviews and fully transcribed, recording the contributions of all members (see Appendix 9 & 10 for the transcriptions of the focus group interviews). I decided to transcribe the audio recordings myself as I was already familiar with the focus group interviews and what was discussed. Once I had transcribed the interviews I listened through them twice again to check for accuracy by comparing them with the audio recordings. The transcriptions do not include gestures, but provides a verbatim record of all spoken language including colloquialisms.

Prior to analysing the data I read through the transcripts three more times. Strauss and Corbin (Strauss & Corbin, 2008) recommend doing this as it will help the researcher 'enter vicariously into the life of the participants, feel what they are experiencing and listen to what they are telling us' (Strauss & Corbin, 2008, p. 163).

The following chapter outlines the method used to analyse the data and the findings from this analysis.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF DATA AND FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction To Chapter 4

The following chapter gives a brief overview of why Grounded Theory was chosen as the analytic method for this study. An overview of the Grounded Theory process follows before the findings from the data analysis are discussed.

4.2 Choice Of Analytic Method

The aim of this study was to investigate what the impact of a Professional Development Group was on staff at a specialist further education college.

Lyons and Coyle (2007) highlight four qualitative research methods or approaches that are widely used by many researchers in psychology. These include:

- Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The aim of IPA is to explore in detail the individual's lived and personal experience and how they make sense of their personal and social world (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Lyons and Coyle (2007) suggest that IPA is

particularly well suited to exploring topics where there is a need to discern how people and understand significant events in their lives.

- Discourse Analysis. This is a 'social constructionist' approach to research (Lyons & Coyle, 2007). A core assumption of this approach is that language is emphasised as a constructive tool and it focuses on the 'public and collective reality' constructed through language use. It looks for patterns of language across texts and considers the relationship between language and the social and cultural contexts in which it is used. Discourse analysis also considers the ways use of language presents different views of the world and different understandings (Paltridge, 2006, p. 2).

- Narrative Analysis. Narrative researchers share a belief in the importance of stories, and they share an interest in the structure and form of the stories people tell (Willig, 2008). This approach generates insights into the structure of the narrative, its functions and its social and/or psychological implications.

- Grounded Theory: The goal of Grounded Theory research is to 'develop theory that will explain the dominant process in the social area being investigated' (Coyne & Cowley, 2006, p. 501). Grounded Theory is designed to facilitate the process of 'discovery' (Willig, 2008) or the construction of themes, descriptions and theories (Walker & Myrick, 2006) depending on which version of Grounded Theory is used. It involves the progressive identification and integration of categories of meaning from data. It is both a method (the process of identification and integration) and a theory (the product).

Research questions seeking to explore processes and/or meanings lend themselves to grounded theory analysis. Lyons and Coyle (2007) suggest that researchers may want to consider using Grounded Theory when there is an interest in eliciting participants' understandings, perceptions and experiences of the world. The research question must be flexible and open-

ended to allow theory to emerge. It should be sufficiently broad to enable a systematic inquiry to be conducted of all the aspects of a phenomenon in depth (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Goulding (1999) suggests that Grounded Theory is suited to exploratory research, and the research question may become more refined and specific during the course of data collection and analysis as the researcher gains a greater awareness of the key issues (Lyons & Coyle, 2007).

Creswell (2003) suggests that a Grounded Theory study challenges researchers for the following reasons:

- The researcher needs to set aside, as much as possible, theoretical ideas or notions so that the analytic, substantive theory can emerge.

- Despite the evolving, inductive nature of this form of qualitative inquiry, the researcher must recognise that this is a systematic approach to research with specific steps in data analysis.

- The researcher faces the difficulty of determining when categories are saturated or when the theory is sufficiently detailed. A situation of theoretical saturation is reached when no new categories or properties emerge from the gathering of further data.

- The researcher needs to recognise that the primary outcome of this study is a theory with specific components: a central phenomenon, causal conditions, strategies, conditions and context, and consequences. These are prescribed categories of information in the theory.

Grounded Theory, whilst a popular approach, is not without its critics. These criticisms are discussed later in section 4.6 on page 94.

Grounded Theory was chosen as the analytic method for this study based on the research aims and questions. This current study aims to elicit

participants' perceptions and experiences of participating in a Professional Development Group. The research questions, for this study, were flexible and open-ended, which are characteristic of Grounded Theory research questions.

I opted to use the Strauss and Corbin version of Grounded Theory as I felt this fitted best with my view of the world and the methods through which we can find out about the world. Mills, Bonner, & Francis (2006) suggest that whilst Strauss and Corbin never directly address the paradigm of thought that underpins their method, their work demonstrates a 'mixture of language that vacillates between post-positivism and constructivism' (p. 27) as terms such as 'recognising bias' and 'maintain objectivity' are used to describe the position the researcher should assume in relation to the participants and the data. Strauss and Corbin (2008) acknowledge that personal opinions may affect the process of coding and consequently the categories formed as they stress that it is not possible to be completely free of bias. This is very much in keeping with my critical realist standpoint.

The 'abbreviated' version of Grounded Theory was used for the data analysis. Willig (2008) suggests that this version should be used if the researcher is working with only the original data. in this version, interview transcripts are analysed following Grounded Theory principles (coding and constant comparative analysis), however, theoretical sensitivity, theoretical saturation and negative case analysis can only be implemented within the texts that are being analysed (Willig, 2008, p. 39). This involves a sentence by sentence analysis of the transcripts. Strauss and Corbin (2008) contend that:

> '….a close encounter with the data in the beginning stages of analysis makes with analysis easier in the later stages because there exists a strong foundation and less need to go back and find missing links'. (Strauss & Corbin, 2008, p. 163)

Willig (2008) explains that this version of Grounded Theory is used when the researcher does not have the opportunity to return to the field to collect further data.

4.3 Origins Of Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory was first proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), who presented the framework and constant comparative method. They defined Grounded Theory as a research methodology that facilitates the "the discovery of theory from data" (p. 1). Their approach emphasised the importance of generating theory from the data rather than having a predetermined hypothesis or specific theoretical framework (Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

Grounded Theory has undergone a series of variations since its inception. Glaser and Strauss diverged in their views as to how to carry out Grounded Theory and continued to develop the approach independently of each other. Depending on the ontological and epistemological beliefs of the researcher, there are several approaches to Grounded Theory research. However, all require the researcher to address a set of common characteristics, such as theoretical sensitivity, theoretical sampling, treatment of the literature, constant comparative methods, coding, the meaning of verification, identifying the core category, memoing and diagramming, and the measure of rigor (McCann & Clark, 2003 cited in Mills et al., 2006).

Glaser (1992; 2002) stressed the generation of theory by allowing it to emerge from the data. Warburton (2005) contends that Glaser's Grounded Theory is a purist approach that relies on an open attitude where the researcher is professionally naïve; in this way, theory generation is not compromised by researchers' prejudices but emerges directly from the data.

In contrast, Strauss and Corbin (1990, 2008) introduced 'a new coding process with a strong emphasis on conditions, context, interaction strategies and consequences' (Goulding, 2002, p. 158). Warburton (2005) suggests that Strauss and Corbin's Grounded Theory could be described as a pragmatic approach with a more structured attitude to theory building as they have developed clear and systematic procedural guidelines for conducting grounded theory research. Their approach prescribes the use of a set of analytical tools and guiding principles (Strauss & Corbin, 2008).

A third approach is the Constructivist Grounded Theory introduced by Charmaz (2000). Charmaz describes it as a contemporary revision of Glaser and Strauss's (1978; 1967) classic grounded theory approach. This approach has its foundations in relativism and an appreciation of the multiple truths and realities of subjectivism. This approach to Grounded Theory places priority on the phenomena of study and sees both data analysis as created from the shared experiences of researcher and participants and the researcher's relationship with participants (Charmaz, 2003). Data analysis is viewed as a construction that locates the data in time, place culture and context, it also reflects the researcher's thinking. This approach to Grounded Theory has not been used in this study.

4.4 The Elements Of Grounded Theory

The three basic elements of Grounded Theory are concepts, categories and propositions. The first element – concepts – is the basic unit of analysis since it is from conceptualisation of data, not the actual data, that theory is developed. Strauss and Corbin (1990) argues that theories can't be built with actual incidents or activities from the raw data. What is observed is analysed as potential indicators of phenomenon and then given conceptual labels. As the researcher encounters other incidents, and when after comparison to the first, they appear to resemble the same phenomena, then these can also be given the same conceptual label. Only by comparing incidents and naming

like phenomena with the same term can the theorist accumulate the basic units for theory.

The second element of Grounded Theory – categories – is higher in level and more abstract than the concepts they represent. The same analytic process of making comparisons to highlight similarities and differences that is used to produce lower level concepts is used to generate categories. Categories are the cornerstones of developing theory, as they provide the means by which the theory can be integrated. While coding, the analyst may note that, although these concepts are different in form, they seem to represent activities directed toward a similar process.

The third element of Grounded Theory are the theoretical propositions, originally termed hypotheses by Glaser and Strauss (1967), which indicate generalised relationships between a category and its concepts and between discrete categories. These could relate to the links between categories, or about a core category, that is, a category which appears central to the study.

The generation and development of concepts, categories and propositions is an iterative process. Grounded theory is not generated *'a priori'* and then subsequently tested. It is:

> '[...] inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it
> represents. That is, discovered, developed, and provisionally
> verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data
> pertaining to that phenomenon. Therefore, data collection,
> analysis, and theory should stand in reciprocal relationship with
> each other. One does not begin with a theory, then prove it.
> Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant
> to that area is allowed to emerge.' (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.
> 23).

The Grounded Theory stages are outlined in the following section.

4.5 Process of Grounded Theory

Strauss and Corbin's method of data analysis for Grounded Theory was adopted for this study. Strauss and Corbin (1990) describe a four stage process to Grounded Theory research which is summarised by Garson (2008) in Table 5.

Table 5: Strauss and Corbin's (1990) Four Stage Process To Grounded Theory

Stage	Description of activity
1	Selection of the research question. Although the researcher in grounded theory does not wish to impose an 'à priori' theoretical framework, it is necessary that the researcher frame a testable research question.
2	Gathering data. While the focal data acquisition method in grounded theory is interviewing of subjects, data may be acquired by a wide variety of qualitative and quantitative methods common to the social sciences, such as focus groups, surveys, and archival research. The researcher selects subjects who are similar on many variables but who differ on a dependent variable in order to discern unique causal factors. Similarly, the researcher may examine subjects who are similar on the dependent variable in order to discern common causal factors.
3	Data coding. After acquisition, data must be organised. "Open coding" initially identifies, labels, and groups in categories the variables associated with the phenomenon being studied. (An example is given in the 'Open Coding' section on page 89). Second, "axial coding" organises the open codes into a "coding paradigm", which is a framework which draws causal relationships between categories and sub-categories. Third, "selective coding" fleshes out the paradigm model by systematically relating core categories to other categories.
4	Validating the story line. Flowing from the selective coding phase, the researcher seeks to validate all relationships in the model through further field testing of generated hypotheses. The final stage enables final development the "story line" of the phenomenon, a narrative focused on the central categories, embodying the "grounded theory" of the phenomenon under study.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) acknowledge that their description of Grounded Theory may appear 'unduly formalistic' (p. 6), however, they warn that the procedures should be taken seriously otherwise a researcher might claim to have used a Grounded Theory approach, when they have only used some of the procedures or have used them incorrectly. Grounded Theory has specific procedures for data collection and analysis, although there is some flexibility.

When conducting Grounded Theory research several assumptions are made:

- The researcher is encouraged to approach the data without any preconceptions.

- The researcher adopts a realist perspective - Grounded Theory assumes that social events and processes take place regardless of the presence of the researcher and that they can be observed and documented by the researcher.

- The researcher acts as a witness and documents what occurs taking care not to import their own assumptions into the analysis.

Cresswell (2003) suggests that the general pattern of understanding or theory will emerge as it begins with initial codes, develops into broad themes, and combine into a grounded theory or broad interpretation.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) emphasise that 'coding is the fundamental analytic process used by the researcher' (p. 12) and there are 3 types of coding, and these are described as follows.

4.5.1   Open Coding

Open coding is the process of breaking down the data into separate units of meaning (Goulding, 1999). Strauss and Corbin (1990, 2008) suggest coding by microanalysis which consists of analysing data word-by-word and coding the meaning found in words or groups of words. This leads to the identification and tentative naming of conceptual categories (Hoepfl, 1997). Each code acts as a label to highlight something that has been noticed in the text and these can be words, phrases or longer pieces of text. Some codes will be concrete and echo what is in the text, other codes may be more abstract and reflect the ideas of the researcher. Words, phrases or events that appear to be similar can be grouped into the same category. These

categories may be gradually modified or replaced during the subsequent stages of analysis that follow.

A fundamental feature of Grounded Theory is the application of the constant comparative method. This involves comparing like with like, to look for emerging patterns and themes (Goulding, 1999). Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggested that 'while coding an incident for a category, compare it with the previous incidents in the same and different groups coded in the same category' (p. 106).

Constantly comparing each piece of data with codes and notes already identified, ensures that the coding is consistent. This enables the researcher to consider the possibility that some of the codes may not fit as well as they could and to seek alternative codes that may be more suitable. It is suggested that as a result of the constant comparison of data, codes are reduced and grouped into meaningful categories (Goulding, 1999). Theoretical saturation should be reached during this level of coding. Saturation is 'the state in which the researcher makes the subjective determination that new data will not provide any new information or insights for the developing categories' (Creswell, 2002, p. 450). According to Goulding (1999) a theory is only considered valid if the researcher has reached the point of saturation.

To ensure theoretical saturation of the data from this current study, line by line coding and comparison between codes within each focus group transcript and between focus groups was utilised.

In addition to open coding, the use of memos is an important part of the process. Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 10) suggest that:

>'Writing theoretical memos is an integral part of doing grounded theory. Since the analyst cannot readily keep track of all the categories, properties, hypotheses, and generative questions that evolve from the analytical process, there must be a system

for doing so. The use of memos constitutes such a system.
Memos are not simply "ideas". They are involved in the
formulation and revision of theory during the research process'
(Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 10).

Memo writing can occur at any stage of the process. During open coding,
code memos focus on conceptual labelling; during axial and selective coding,
theoretical memos focus on paradigm features and indications of process.
Plus, during the evolving research design, operational memos can contain
directions relating to the evolving research design.

During the course of this research memos served several purposes, such as,
fleshing out categories and their properties, questioning assumptions and
hidden meanings in the language, connecting categories, and asking
questions. Memos were written following each meeting and after each focus
group session, to help capture my thoughts and ideas to maintain focus on
the research and ensure that important ideas were not lost (Strauss &
Corbin, 2008). Memos were also written as new ideas emerged during the
analysis of the data.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest that diagramming occurs concurrently
with memo-writing after each level of coding. The purpose of diagramming is
to compare memos and try to fit them together into a visual diagram, to
indicate the relationship of the core categories and their properties to other
categories and their properties. The visual diagram is a tool to help bring the
pieces of the conceptual model together into a logical order.

Diagramming can help sort the relationships between categories and
describe those relationships (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Due to the concise
and precise nature of diagrams, they also force the researcher to 'finalise
relationships and discover breaks in logic' (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 238)
that need to be repaired.

Figure 8: Example Of Transcript From PDG 1 Focus Group And Open Coding

There's also the debriefing aspect of it, it's part of the process, it's quite a healthy aspect that I don't think anyone should feel bad about having to get something off their chest *[safe to offload onto others / debriefing]*, you know through GFE imagine you're working with someone one to one for quite a long time, you feel like you're on your own and it's nice to kind of feedback *[giving and sharing feedback]*. Yeah it is nice to know that everybody else is also experiencing the same issues *[not alone with issues]*.	Memo: are the participants describing a sense of belonging? Are they talking about identity?

Figure 9: Example Of Transcript From PDG 2 Focus Group And Open Coding

I thought that when you finished on solutions *[generation of (effective) strategies/solutions]* that was a positive thing because you go away with a bit of a *[left meetings feeling positive]*, that is good, something to do, something to try, you got something out of it, it felt productive *[meetings felt productive]*. You also found that people agreed with your methods as well *[validation from others]*, some people don't agree with what you do. You get an indication as to what you're doing is right *[validation from others]*. They can't understand why you're doing this method and they say perhaps you're giving into students, not really you're just building bridges and things. - *So a sharing of knowledge or a sharing of practice…* Both, sharing with everybody and getting everyone's feedback and everyone's different *[giving and sharing feedback]*. - *So you felt that was quite useful, people understanding why you did things the way you did.* [?] explain why you did this, why the student is allowed to do this *[a chance to explain yourself]*. - *The rationale isn't it.* The rationale for why you've done it, yeah the rationale *[rationale for certain strategies]*.	Memo: validation - are these participants describing a sense of belonging? Are they talking about identity as a group? Memo: building bridges - are the staff talking about sharing tacit knowledge?

Open coding took place on the transcripts where a detailed line-by-line analysis of the text was conducted in order to generate and label concepts. As this was occurring, memos were also written to reflect and keep track of any ideas that developed during the process. The coding process was carried out personally rather than using any software as it was felt that, whilst it was more time consuming, this would enable a richer and fuller

understanding of the data and the emerging concepts. Examples of the
opening coding process are given in Figure 8 and Figure 9.

4.5.2   Axial Coding

The next stage of Grounded Theory involves re-examination of the codes
identified to determine how they are linked, the process of axial coding
(Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The categories generated during open coding are
compared, refined and reduced. The purpose of coding is to not only
describe but to acquire new understanding of a phenomenon of interest.
Causal events that contribute to the phenomenon; descriptive details of the
phenomenon itself; and the implications of the phenomenon under study
must all be identified and explored (Hoepfl, 1997).

This is achieved by exploring the following elements which influence the
phenomenon – the key 'thing' – and/or social processes that are being
studied:

- Conditions – what influences the central phenomenon. These are the
  events or variables that lead to the occurrence or development of the
  phenomenon.

- Context – where is this phenomenon occurring, at what time, with
  whom etc. A set of conditions influencing the action/strategy.

- Action/interactional strategies – what are people doing in order to
  influence or manage that situation; how do they achieve that change.

- Consequences - what happens when something is finished, what is it
  that has finally happened.

As additional data is collected, the researcher moves back and forth amongst the data collection, all the time open coding and axial coding and continually refining the categories and their interconnections.

During axial coding a theoretical model is identified and the researcher is responsible for determining whether sufficient data exists to support that interpretation. Table 6 describes the categories generated from the list of codes from the open coding process.

Table 6: List Of Categories And Codes Generated From The Two Focus Group Meetings

Categories	Codes
Group Dynamics	• Group members worked well together • Openness of group members • Mixture of staff • Equality of group • Optimal group size • (one person) uncomfortable in group • (one person) reluctance to participate
Relevance Of Focus	• Practical way of dealing with issues not reading about them • Behaviours a live issue not a paper issue • Meetings are an alternative way of addressing issues
Emotional Support	• Validation from others • Left meetings feeling positive • Safe to offload onto others / debriefing • Not alone with issues • Felt safe to talk about issues • Felt good to talk if having problems*
Info Sharing	• Sharing experiences • Richer information • Unpicking complex issues • Explaining to others what they have learned • Giving and sharing feedback
Sharing Good Practice	• Sharing insight into what works • Discussing what doesn't work • Rationale for certain strategies

Developing Understanding	• Discussion of reasons for behaviour / triggers
	• Need to understand problems before solution finding
	• Finding out about the students / getting to know them
Developing Practice	• Developing own practice
	• Reflection develops practice
	• Change in practice possible
Communication	• A chance to explain yourself
	• Felt good to talk if having problems*
	• Helpful to talk
	• Good to hear what other people have to say
	• Talking about incidents
	• Communicating with all levels of staff
Reflection	• Clarification and reflection of issues
	• Reflecting on own practice
	• How the situation is seen has changed
	• Attribution of failed strategy
Value Of Meeting	• Feel more involved as meetings progress and results are seen
	• Have to believe in spending time on these things [meetings]
	• Value of meetings would be mixed
	• Meetings felt productive
	• Success of meetings has valued from top down
	• Meetings were useful / enjoyable
	• Meeting times should be protected / made a priority
Practical Strategies	• Multiple strategies
	• Generation of effective strategies / solutions
	• New strategies were discussed
	• Different strategies needed for behaviours
	• Discussion of strategies that hadn't been thought of before
Flexibility	• Meetings were staff led
	• Open meetings for staff to set agenda
	• Able to talk about a range of students not just "problem" students
Perseverance	• Attitude to dealing with difficult issues
	• Keep trying different strategies
Process	• Repetition of issues
	• Focus of meetings
	• Balance of discussion

	• Follow up / review needed • Regular meetings • Directed process • "Focused meetings sharpened the mind"
Logistics	• Consideration of when to hold meetings • Meetings are time consuming • Difficulty getting people together
Use Of Time	• Time constraints • Dedicated time to talk • Constructive use of time

4.5.3   Selective Coding

The aim of this final stage is to draw together codes and categories to create an overarching theory, a rich, tightly woven account that 'closely approximates the reality it represents' (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 57). If, at this stage, one category is mentioned with high frequency and is well connected to other categories this can be adopted as the core category. This core category can act as a thread through which all aspects of the emerging theory are incorporated.

During the selective coding process, I grouped the categories together in a visual form – diagramming – which allowed me to move the categories around and examine the relationships between them. Through this process, I was able to see where connections among categories appeared strong and where they were weaker. This enabled me to make connections between the categories and how they related to each other and the core category (see Appendix 11).

Whilst the stages of Grounded Theory are presented in a linear way, in practice they may occur simultaneously and repeatedly. During axial coding the researcher may decide to revise the initial codes that have been identified, which could lead to a re-examination of the raw data. Additional data collection may occur at any point if gaps are uncovered in the data.

During data collection, informal analysis of the initial data can and should guide subsequent data collection (Hoepfl, 1997).

4.5.4   Rigour

Several techniques were used to ensure rigour, including constant comparison, negative case analysis (or looking for cases that don't fit), participant checks, and focusing on the characteristics or aspects of a situation or conversation that are relevant to the phenomena that is being studied.

The focus group evaluation recordings were listened to repeatedly, while reading and re-reading the text. Finally, selected participants reviewed the findings and provided feedback to ensure my interpretation was consistent with their experience and understanding.

Due to time constraints and difficulty arranging meetings at a suitable time for College staff, further meetings with them could not be arranged. However, line by-line analysis of the data (transcripts) was conducted to ensure saturation.

4.6 Criticisms Of Grounded Theory

Grounded theory was developed and established over 40 years ago and it remains popular (Thomas & James, 2006). However, much criticism has been levied at it in that time.

Hughes and Jones (2003) suggests that the procedures associated with Grounded Theory are especially time-consuming, however, it could be argued that is true for any qualitative approach. The process of transcribing, coding and comparing is a particularly lengthy process. Whilst this is a major

criticism of the Grounded Theory method, it can be argued that it introduces the necessary rigour into the interpretive process, though some researchers may choose to by-pass this level of attention.

As in all qualitative research, findings cannot be generalised widely.

Thomas and James (2006) argues that Grounded Theory oversimplifies complex meanings and inter-relationships in data. Layder (1993) suggests that a grounded theory approach highlights the immediately apparent and observable at the expense of attending to the interweaving of structural features of social situations with activities. It is also argued that the development of theory in a grounded theory approach should be more guided by data than limited by it.

Thomas (2006) suggests that procedure is placed before the interpretation of the data, thus constraining analysis. Robrecht (1995) suggests that the elaborate sampling procedure described by Strauss and Corbin (1990, 2008) diverts attention away from the data and toward techniques and procedures. Robrecht (1995) argues that these elaborations encourage researchers 'to look for data rather than look at data' (p. 171).

Critics of Grounded Theory suggest the lack of a literature review before conducting grounded theory research is naïve and unrealistic in many cases. It is suggested that in order for a researcher to know that an area is worthy of new research, a literature review needs to be conducted beforehand. This criticism has been addressed on page 11. Strauss and Corbin (2008) suggest that with a Grounded Theory approach, general reading of the literature is performed to assist the researcher in formulating questions for initial interviews and observations, however, an extensive preliminary literature review is delayed.

Another criticism is levelled at the notion that the researcher suspends any preconceptions and presuppositions and for any theory to emerge and be 'grounded' in the data. Thomas and James (2006) suggest that it is

impossible for a researcher to free themselves of preconceptions in the collection and analysis of data in the way that Glaser and Strauss (1967) say is necessary. It can be argued that the researcher should acknowledge the impossibility of tabula rasa. Strauss and Corbin (2008) recognise that qualitative or quantitative research has an element of subjectivity but they also stress the importance of taking appropriate measures to minimise the subjectivity in the data analysis.

Thomas and James (2006) contend that the formulaic nature of Grounded Theory lacks congruence with open and creative interpretation. Strauss and Corbin (2008) argue that these techniques are designed to be used with creativity, flexibility and intelligence. They explain that it is the construction of new insights and understanding which are significant and useful that is at the heart of this approach.

Kennedy and Lingard (2006) caution that much of the literature which state that a Grounded Theory approach has been adopted, overflows with detailed descriptions of thematic categories accompanied by illustrative and entertaining excerpts, but no theory. They suggest that most Grounded Theory research never makes it to theory due to researchers describing themes, not developing theory, something that they termed 'analysis interruptus' (p. 105). However, following the data analysis, I hope to refute this suggestion by producing a distinctive model or theoretical framework.

4.7 Findings

The emergent theory presented in this section describes the impact of a Professional Development Group on staff working in a specialist college.

The theory consists of one core category and three key categories. As previously explained, the core category can act as a thread through which all aspects of the emerging theory are incorporated. College staff highlighted

three things as being important outcomes of the process, which I have termed 'conversation' – the core category, 'affective outcomes' – key category, and 'practical outcomes' – key category. 'Aspects of the meetings' was another key category to emerge from the data. See Figure 10 for their proposed inter-relationship. Figure 10 also highlights the directionality of the influences of each category.

Within the core category of conversation, communication and information sharing gives rise to reflection and developing understanding. Conversation is essential for the development of affective outcomes (emotional support, group dynamics and perseverance), and practical outcomes (sharing good practice, practical strategies and developing own practice). In Figure 10 the strong influence of conversation on affective outcomes and practical outcomes is highlighted by a bolder outline and arrow. Aspects of the meetings are needed for conversation to take place and in turn for affective outcomes and practical outcomes to occur. The influence of aspects of the meetings on conversation, affective outcomes and practical outcomes is highlighted by the direction of the arrows.

The findings from this current study very much echo the previous research into similar types of staff support groups, professional development groups, staff consultation groups or communities of practice.

The following section will describe this in more detail.

Figure 10: Diagrammatic Representation Of The Emergent Theory

CONVERSATION

- Communication   - Reflection
- Information   - Developing
  sharing   understanding

AFFECTIVE OUTCOMES

- Emotional support
- Group dynamics
- Perseverance

PRACTICAL OUTCOMES

- Sharing good practice
- Practical strategies
- Developing own practice

ASPECTS OF THE MEETINGS
- Flexibility
- Relevance of focus
- Use of time
- Logistics
- Process
- Value of meetings
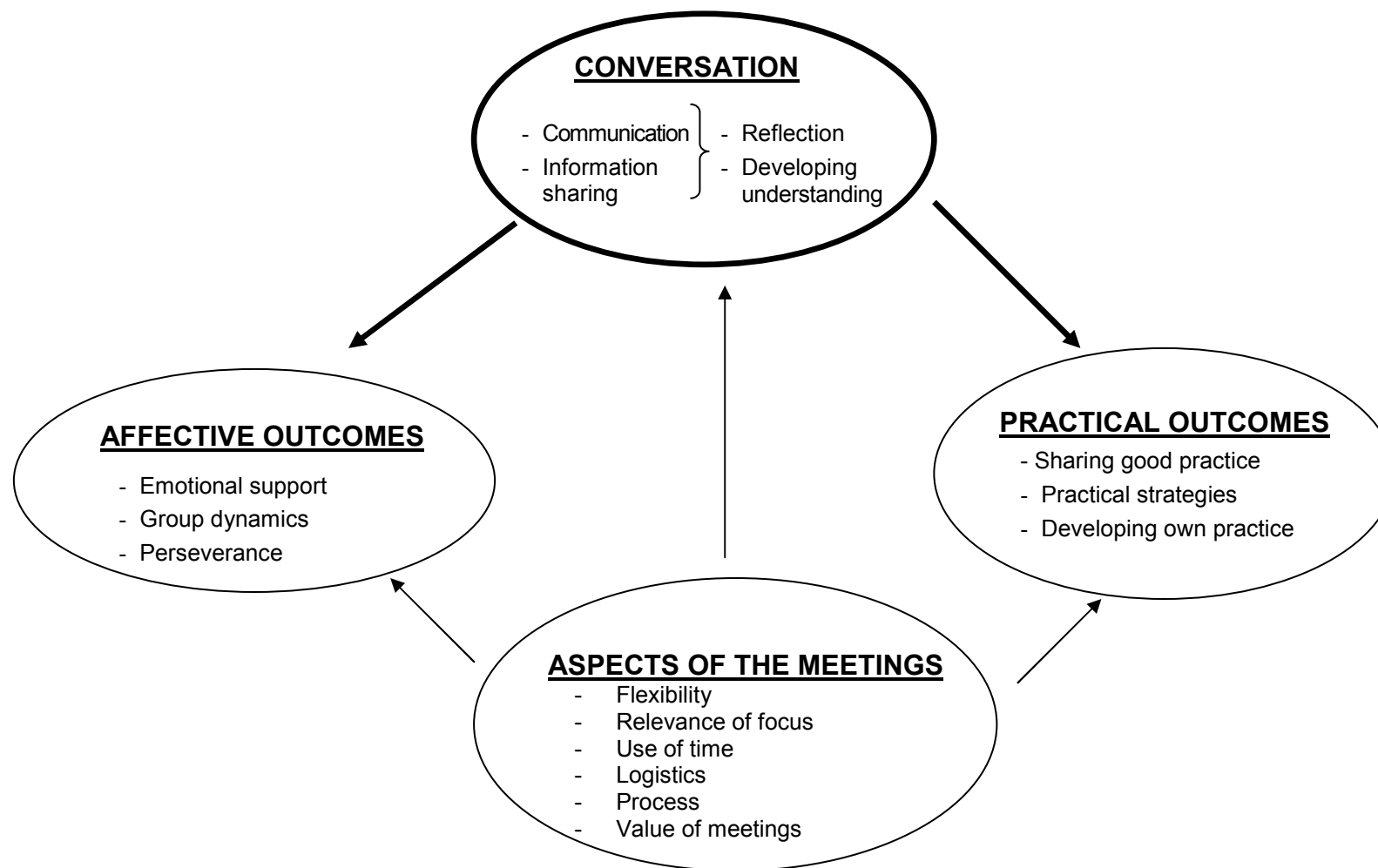
4.7.1 Conversation: Communication / Information Sharing / Reflection / Developing Understanding

The central or core category to emerge was conversation. For both focus groups there was much discussion around communication and sharing information, which enabled them to reflect upon and develop an understanding of behaviour/issues or the students that they were working with.

4.7.1.1 Communication

The findings suggest that communication was a key factor in the Professional Development Group meetings. Communication in this instance relates to participants being able to talk to others about issues and how they felt it was helpful to talk to their colleagues. They also mentioned it being useful to listen to what their colleagues had to say. Participants also commented that the Professional Development Group meetings facilitated communication between all levels of staff.

Participants in group 1 indicated that the act of talking with colleagues was helpful:

> *"That's really handy as well because like you say sometimes the students behave differently to different people and also in different sessions, so then you will be talking and someone will go, 'oh Ashley has been an absolute nightmare and he wouldn't do this, or he wouldn't do that' or whatever, but then I'll be like, 'but he's been super in my session', so there's obviously something, you know what is it that's making him behave like that, I think that's good because we don't get that much opportunity to just to sit and talk about the students do we?"*

> *"No, no, and I think that should happen a bit more."*

> *"And it's helpful."*

Participants in group 2 echoed that talking with others gave them a chance to explain themselves to their colleagues:

> *"It's just a time to explain yourself really, to talk to others. 'Cos[2] often times in the staffroom you can't be bothered 'cos you're having your lunch."*

There is a sense that participants viewed these conversations as 'special' as time is put aside specifically.

Participants in group 2 also indicated that it was useful to have a mixture of staff to communicate with:

> *"Best, if you get a GFE[3], it would be useful to get, LSAs, tutors, managers because you get a more fuller picture of the person, you get a fuller picture of the behaviour….."*

4.7.1.2 Information Sharing

Sharing information was one aspect of the meetings that participants appreciated and having a mixture of staff attending the Professional Development Group meetings helped give participants a fuller picture of the students they were working with. Information sharing, the act of taking stored managed knowledge and making it useful, helped staff unpick complex issues. Being able to explain to others what they have learned and the opportunity to give and share feedback were also mentioned.

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2   The audio recordings from the evaluation meetings have been transcribed verbatim including colloquialisms.

3   GFE = General Further Education.

The participants felt that the Professional Development Group meetings were a useful tool in getting to know the students through other people's experiences of working with them:

> *"Well I think in the meetings as well you get, especially if you don't know the students and then you listen to others who've had them in their session, I mean they're quite good to get their point of view on what the student's personality is like as well."*

Participants felt that mix of staff enabled them to get a sense of the individual in question and provided a richer source of information:

> *"[.....]so I suppose if you get a range of different posts then you're going to get a more full picture of the person and the behaviour, but whether it's helpful for people taking part in the meetings or helpful for the students is one thing, helpful for the meetings is another."*

Through conversation and information sharing, group members felt there was opportunity to develop understanding and to reflect.

4.7.1.3 Developing Understanding

Participants felt that the Professional Development Group meetings were a platform to discuss the reasons for behaviours and triggers. They talked about needing to understand problems or issues before solutions or strategies could be found. Participants also felt that the meetings were a useful way of getting to know students through other people's experiences and knowledge.

Through having conversations with others, participants felt they were able to develop an understanding of the issues and behaviours that they came across.

> *"[.....]I think what's useful is why do you think they're behaving like that, I think that it was useful to have that incorporated as well [into the meetings], what the triggers are."*

Participants in group 2 echoed this:

> *"It's about looking at the challenging behaviour and how it changes all the time for various different factors; to go from sixteen to seventeen might be enough, problems at home. Issues can be reframed and reflected upon.....[bad sound quality]. People do things for different reasons all the time, you know it might be for attention one day, it might be for escape another day and to come back round to certain issues and look at the reasons for it is really useful."*

4.7.1.4 Reflection

Conversation and information sharing enabled staff to clarify and reflect on issues/concerns or situations that they were finding difficult to cope with. They were able to reflect on their own practice, and their perception of issues, such as the attribution of a failed strategy.

Through conversations with others, participants felt that there was an opportunity to clarify and reflect on issues:

> *".......but I think what's useful is why do you think they're behaving like that, I think that it was useful to have that incorporated as well, what the triggers are."*

"The behaviour triggers and solutions, strategies…."

*"The thing is the triggers, they can, the triggers can be like
anything. You know, it could be like things like what's going
on [bad sound quality], the environment or the teaching, the
session or something going on at home."*

Participants also talked about the opportunity to reflect on their own working
practice:

*"It's about talking about what works or doesn't work, about
what you did as well. You can talk about what went wrong
and think about things like if you were talking too much or
you didn't explain something…."*

These statements also suggest that an eco-systemic approach (Cooper &
Upton, 1991) is beginning to be adopted when thinking about challenging
situations.

4.7.2   Affective Outcomes: Emotional Support / Group Dynamics / Perseverance

A key category to emerge from the data analysis was affective outcomes:
emotional support, the dynamics of the group and perseverance.

4.7.2.1 Emotional Support

Many comments pertained to the emotional support that participants felt they
received during the Professional Development Group meetings. Emotional
support relates to validation from others, feeling positive after the meetings,
feeling safe to offload onto others (debriefing), not feeling alone with issues,

feeling safe to talk about issues and the fact that it was good to talk about problems.

Participants in group 1 talked about the opportunity to attend the meetings and offload some of their anxieties to colleagues:

> "I thought it was useful that, I remember one of the meetings we were talking about Graeme being a total smartarse in your session and he would tell the other students what to do and be really bossy and things like that, and I think that's really good because I know he was being difficult in your sessions, and I think it's good to talk about if you are experiencing difficulty every week with a student and you're dreading your session because you know they're going to be there then it's really good to go along and see what other people have got to say rather than not being able to say it to anyone."

They also talked about not feeling alone in dealing with difficult situations, explaining:

> "Sometimes with difficult behaviour you feel like that it's just you, and him or her and you know, so it does help."

> "It's good to know you're not the only person dealing with that."

Participants in the other Professional Development Group also discussed emotional support such as feeling safe to offload or debrief with others:

> "There's also the debriefing aspect of it, it's part of the process, it's quite a healthy aspect that I don't think anyone should feel bad about having to get something off their chest."

They also talked about feeling validated with regards to their own practice:

"You also found that people agreed with your methods as well, sometimes you feel that people don't agree with what you do."

"You get an indication as to what you're doing is right."

4.7.2.2 Group Dynamics

Participants were positive about the issues relating to group dynamics and talked about group members working well together, the mix of staff that attended the meetings, the openness of group members and the equality of the group.

Group dynamics were important to developing emotional support and participants commented on the compatibility of the group members due to having an optimal number of people in the group:

"Yeah I think the size of our group was quite good, I think if you had more people it would be too much…."

"……It was good that we were all together because we all sort of paired off with each other."

Participants in group 1 commented on the openness of the meetings and those involved:

"It's better because you don't have hearsay, someone said this and well I didn't say that, if you're in the meeting and recording it you can say we discussed this and this is the strategy we came up with, rather than someone just say 'Lisa

said this' or we tried it and it didn't work, I think it's better this way."

"So you could actually discuss things out in the open rather than other people saying, they said this or said that?"[4]

"Yeah I was talking to Lisa last week, this morning, just record it."

Members of group 2 also talked about the openness of the group members:

"I noticed, I hope it's relevant, I was speaking to somebody from the other group and they said they felt quite a lot of intimidation from other people, I didn't feel that within our group, but I know somebody from the other group felt quite uncomfortable about having their working practices questioned kind of thing, well that works for me so I don't know why it doesn't work for you kind of thing, and whether that was true but that was certainly was their perception of it but I felt our group was sort of a bit more, more open…."

As noted, one member of staff was uncomfortable in their group and subsequently reluctant to make any further comments that may have benefited the group meetings.

"…I started in the first meeting and something was said, I'll not mention too much about it, and I felt reluctant to ever say again, and very, very reluctant to draw on past experiences, remind, mind, I was bringing past experiences to help people not to boast about where I've been what I've done so I felt it was just, sarcastic remark, and left it at that so I was very reluctant to say anything else with the group, nobody here

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4 My questions and comments are shown in bold.

> *I'm talking about, but I did felt like it was very hostile the*
> *comment that was made. I'll tell you later but not now."*

At the time of the Professional Development Group meetings this was not known, however, the ethics of this has been addressed on page 63 in the Methodology chapter and the implications of this have been addressed on page 126.

4.7.2.3 Perseverance

The final affective outcome was perseverance, relating to comments regarding participants' attitudes to dealing with difficult situations and their willingness to keep trying with different strategies.

Comments made by participants in group 2 indicated that they may more readily persevere in trying strategies that were effective in supporting students:

> *".....it would be nice, you know like with the solution*
> *generation to have a bank of things, say we'll try that first and*
> *if that doesn't work we've now discovered we've got that,*
> *we've got that, we've got that, and it's a bit more sort of belt*
> *and braces. I think a lot of the time at staff meetings on a*
> *Thursday we come out with, well we'll try that and then it*
> *goes away and it doesn't get dealt with you know it doesn't*
> *work and nobody really addresses it, where with the solution*
> *generation…….we could go through, OK we could try that*
> *one first and then work through them."*

Similarly, participants in group 1 also suggested that they may be more likely to persevere with alternative strategies:

"It's good to see what different approaches people take in certain situations with certain students because you might take one approach and it might not work and you think 'oh well' its him and leave it. But another person has a different approach that you might try and it might work….."

4.7.3   Practical Outcomes: Sharing Good Practice / Practical Strategies / Developing Own Practice

A key category to emerge from the data was practical outcomes. These related to sharing good practice, the development or discussion of practical strategies and staff developing their own practice.

4.7.3.1 Sharing Good Practice

The participants felt that the Professional Development Group meetings were a useful platform to share good practice. This relates to sharing insight into what works and doesn't work, and the rationale for the use of certain strategies.

Participants talked about being able to discuss strategies that have not been effective as well as those that seem to be effective:

"It's about talking about what works or doesn't work, about what you did as well. You can talk about what went wrong and think about things like if you were talking too much or you didn't explain something and it helps you develop your own practice as well."

Participants also explained that they also had the opportunity to explain why they worked with a student in a particular way. This was particularly

appreciated as their strategies may not have always been understood by their colleagues:

> *"They can't understand why you're doing this method and they say perhaps you're giving in to students, not really you're just building bridges and things."*

> ***"So a sharing of knowledge or a sharing of practice?"***

> *"Both, sharing with everybody and getting everyone's feedback and everyone's different."*

> ***"So you felt that was quite useful, people understanding why you did things the way you did?"***

> *"You're able to explain why you did this, why the student is allowed to do this."*

> ***"The rationale isn't it?"***

> *"The rationale for why you've done it, yeah the rationale."*

4.7.3.2 Practical Strategies

Discussions also focused on practical strategies, including the generation of effective strategies and solutions, discussion of new strategies, different strategies were needed for, sometimes similar, behaviours, and discussion of strategies that hadn't been thought of before.

Participants in group 1 talked about the meetings being a forum of sharing strategies that they have found useful:

> *"It's good to see what different approaches people take in certain situations with certain students……"*

> *"……I think it's good because Kate might go 'well I've had Graeme in my sessions and I've done this'."*

Other participants were equally positive about the practical outcomes of the meetings; however, they felt that this may not have happened as much as they would have liked:

> *"It [the meetings] was more focused around sort of the middle stages rather than talking about strategies. There were a few times when we got to some really effective strategies though."*

Participants also commented on the emotional impact of generating solutions that they could try:

> *"It was always nice to leave on a high because you left on this sort solution generation and saying well yeah we'll all go and do that, we'll go and try that, there was one, there was one session in particular where we had come up with things we hadn't really thought of….."*

> *"……..I thought that when you finished on solutions that was a positive thing because you go away with a bit of a, that is good, something to do, something to try, you got something out of it, it felt productive."*

4.7.3.3 Developing Practice

As well as talking about the Professional Development Group meetings being a forum to generate strategies, participants also commented to the

development of their own practice, how reflecting on issues developed practice, and that a change in practice was possible.

Participants in group 1 talked about how talking through strategies helped in their own practice:

"I mean the behaviours are not as bad as they were."

"We do still get them and its still, you know, if you haven't got that student and then you go into a session that has got that student in you then understand what to do."

This suggests that staff perceptions of effectiveness may have shifted. They went on to say:

"It's good to see what different approaches people take in certain situations with certain students….But another person has a different approach that you might try and it might work….."

Similarly, participants in group 2 explained that reflecting on what they were doing supported them to develop their own working practice:

"It's about talking about what works or doesn't work, about what you did as well…….and it helps you develop your own practice as well."

4.7.4   Aspects Of The Meetings

Another category to emerge from the data related to the issues that could affect or influence the outcome of the meetings. These issues related to sharing good practice, the development or discussion of practical strategies and developing their own practice.

4.7.4.1 Flexibility

Participants discussed issues regarding the 'flexibility' of the meetings. Flexibility relates to meetings being staff led, and that staff could set the agenda. They also commented that they felt able to talk about a range of students and not just "problem" students.

Participants in group 1 noted the scope for the meetings to discuss all students and not only the ones who demonstrated behaviour that challenged staff:

> *"I think it would be good if we covered all the students as well, generally we only cover the ones who are causing any bother, where as the ones who don't cause any bother for example Anthony he doesn't, he's inoffensive but he doesn't come to your sessions, don't know why."*

> *"He's displaying challenging behaviour in his own way isn't he?"*

> *"He just gets forgotten doesn't he, that would be really good, just, we could cover everybody."*

Participants in group 2 felt it was useful for the Professional Development Group Meetings to be staff led, explaining:

> *"…[previous staff meetings] it wasn't staff generated though generally, well it wasn't, the attendees, I went to a couple and it was just if you wanted to talk about such and such today you weren't really asked. So in that sense I think that's quite good in you left it open, in sort of burning issues naturally come to the top."*

4.7.4.2 Relevance Of Focus

Relevance of focus was an important aspect of the meetings to emerge from the focus groups. Both Professional Development Groups felt that it was important to discuss and have a face-to-face conversation with others about the issues they faced in their working practice.

Participants explained that all too often, there was very little time to talk about the issues or concerns that were occurring in college. Generally, there was a brief mention of an issue during the weekly staff meeting to ask staff to consult the community folder[5] on the College network so staff could read about the situation.

> "….behaviour more sort of a live issue rather than just the
> things that just, "OK right there's something in the community
> folder, can everybody read it", and I don't know if anybody
> does or not…….behaviour is more of a live issue rather than
> a paper issue."

4.7.4.3 Use Of Time

Participants talked about the usefulness of having a dedicated time to talk about issues and it being a constructive use of time. They also commented on the fact that time constraints could hinder the process.

As mentioned previously, participants in group 2 talked about how valued the use of the time:

> "I think just making time for something like that, you know it's
> all very well doing it as a standing issue on a staff meeting
> but something we don't do enough of is having behaviour

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5 Community folder = shared documents are kept electronically on the College network to enable staff to access important information.

meetings or something like these meetings and following that through you know…..You find that people were having problems with the same types of things but not having a space and a time to say right we'll get a few people in a room and actually see if we can do something constructive about it rather than just moaning and shooting in the dark with solutions."

Participants in group 1 echoed the meetings were a dedicated time to talk:

"……So it was good that we had the time, it was allocated."

4.7.4.4 Logistics

Participants discussed the logistics of putting regular meetings together. Logistics relates to the consideration of when to hold meetings, that meetings could be time consuming, and the difficulty of getting people together.

Both groups discussed the difficulties in arranging meetings with staff. Participants in group 1 talked about other priorities over the meetings:

"It's just finding time, sometimes it's hard getting everyone together."

"Yeah because everyone's either out GFEing[6] or something."

They went on to comment:

"OK so you said something about the time of day the meetings are held?"

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6 GFE – General Further Education. Many staff at SFEC support students at a GFE college to access alternative courses such as A-Levels or NVQs.

> *"I'm always really late, I really apologise for that, because of the handover and…"*

Participants in group 2 commented on the time consuming nature of discussing complex issues:

> *"If there were really complex issues……. you would probably need more than one strategy to get out of that, you would need to go and unpick it go right back to the beginning and that obviously takes an awful lot of time…"*

4.7.4.5 Process

Participants talked about the process of the meetings such as their structure, time limits on the meetings to focus the discussions and visually recording pertinent points of the meetings.

Participants in group 1 felt there was a need to follow up and review the strategies that had been discussed in previous meetings to determine how successful they were:

> *"Because then you're sorting it out aren't you. You're sorting that problem out instead of going onto another one and not getting over what strategies or how…I mean, we did do that sometimes and talk about the strategies but sometimes we didn't…"*

Participants in group 2 felt there was a need to place a stronger emphasis on the structure of the meetings:

> *"I think like we said before getting bogged down on the details, I know details are important, but flitting from similar*

subject to similar in the middle, although they seemed similar but probably are quite different."

"Yeah reading behind it they're probably completely different and probably a lot of time we did go off on tangents. I mean it was good to debrief about different people but it just wasn't very productive."

Participants in group 2 also discussed the merit of placing a time limit on the meetings to focus the discussion of the issue:

"Put a time limit on the meetings, I don't know if it would work but we used to have quarter to nine to nine o'clock we used to have staff meetings every morning and at nine o'clock it stopped, it just stopped which meant you had to be relevant to what you were saying, there was items to be brought up from yesterday and for today and it had to be sorted, there was none of this oh where are we going on holiday, it was like on task, focused, this is what we're doing and it was sort of sharpened you into thinking because you had to stay with it and you had to do it within that time."

".........And if you did it regular enough you could even do it in half an hour meeting, from half nine until ten or something like that and say right we're discussing one issue here and if you're doing it every week then maybe you could get through that, enough issues and half an hour would really focus people if you got one issue."

4.7.4.6 Value Of Meetings

Participants' comments included feeling more involved as the meetings progressed and results were seen, a need to believe in spending time on

these meetings, the meetings feeling productive, meetings to be valued from the top down for them to be successful, their being useful/enjoyable, and that meeting times should be protected or made a priority.

Participants in group 2 felt that people needed to value the meetings in order for them to work:

> "I think you have to want to do it, you have to believe in spending time on these things…..the more results you see, the more involved people feel in the process…...."

This speaks to the notion of staff taking ownership of their professional development which in turn can increase staff self-efficacy (Mizell, 2008).

Participants commented on the need for managers to value the meetings in order for them to be seen as a priority:

> "Well, incidentally, we're having skills to life meetings on the morning and the first ones were the twenty third of November at NR at half eight in the morning, so it's got to be arranged that we have time away from college here and to travel all the way over there so if you want to change the time for these meetings, we'll try and get time out of sessions, first thing in the morning is great for me."

> "It [meetings] would need to be valued enough by the managers to do that."

Participants from group 1 commented on the need for this type of meeting to be prioritised:

> "….I suppose if you get advance warning, you say I've got to be at this meeting, I have to drop this as its more important, I think it should be prioritised this kind of thing, it's just sometimes you've got lots of stuff to do."

The findings have illustrated that central to the emergent theory is the core category of conversation and the inter-related key categories of affective outcomes, practical outcomes and aspects of the meetings.

The following chapter will consider the findings that have been presented. These findings will be discussed in light of both the research questions, in relation to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and the additional literature search that was conducted following the data analysis.

CHAPTER 5: CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT AND DISCUSSION

5.1   Introduction To Chapter 5

This chapter will introduce how additional literature relates to the concept development stage. I will then discuss the three concepts that I believe have emerged from the data analysis. The implications of the current study are then addressed, with particular reference to the current economic climate. I will also reflect upon the research process and the outcomes.

5.2 The Additional Literature Search

In keeping with a Grounded Theory approach I conducted an additional literature search.

It has been argued that the initial literature review helps to identify an area of interest and research, and the subsequent review turns to an entirely new body of literature (Hudson, 2002). Wuest (2007) suggests that during this secondary review, the literature is 'theoretically sampled and added as supporting data for the theory' (Wuest, 2007, p. 261). Strauss & Corbin (1994) contend that selective sampling of the second body of literature

should be woven into the emerging theory during the 'concept development' stage, grounded theory's third stage.

In contrast, Glaser (1978) asserts that the researcher should refrain from accessing this second body of literature until the theory has emerged from the data. Therefore this secondary review occurs at a later stage, 'once the core category, its properties and related categories have emerged and the basic conceptual development is well underway' (Glaser & Holton, 2004, p. 12).

As my research has utilised Strauss and Corbin's (1990) method of Grounded Theory, I have conducted a second review of the literature during the concept development stage. This additional literature review had a confirmatory function, in that it helped support the emerging theory.

The following section will describe what I believe to be the emerging theory and I will relate this to existing research. The overarching research question for this study was:

- **What is the perception of college staff of their experiences following participation in a Professional Development Group?**

Additional key questions are:

- Does participating in the meetings support staff in their professional development and working practice?

- What is the nature of the impact?

5.3 Concept Development

5.3.1 The Professional Development Group As A Community Of Practice

The Professional Development Groups, conducted as part of this study, could be described as Communities of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). The main aim of the Professional Development Groups was for participants to share concerns and develop their understandings about the issues they faced when working with students through interaction and conversation. They were structured to provide the conditions that enabled participants to engage in conversations that are not normally possible in their daily work. Such conditions include time and space away from the hectic nature of the workplace and the opportunity to interact with colleagues, engage in meaningful conversations and generate solutions. Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) suggest that within a Community of Practice, as the people spend time together they 'typically share information, insight and advice' (p. 4). Members help each other 'solve problems by discussing their situations, their aspirations, their needs. They ponder common issues, explore ideas and act as sounding boards. They may create tools, standards, generic designs, manuals and other documents – or they may simply develop a tacit understanding that they share' (Wenger *et al.*, 2002, pp. 4-5).

As set out in my findings, the core theme to emerge was that of conversation. Participants felt that the meetings were a forum for open discussion of issues with colleagues, for listening to what colleagues had to say and for gaining insight or developing working practice. Through regular conversations with colleagues, participants had the opportunity to develop a shared language. Baker (2006) suggests that adult learners engage through language that becomes a key to how meanings about the world are built up, shared and negotiated. Conversations provide access to sources of ideas, materials, feedback, solace and encouragement crucial for both survival in the classroom and professional growth (Hu, 2005).

Wenger (1998) suggests that through Communities of Practice there is the opportunity to engage in what he termed 'reification'; the process of giving form to experience by producing objects. Wenger (1998) states, 'any community of practice produces abstractions, tools, symbols, stories, terms, and concepts that reify something of that practice in a congealed form' (p. 59). Others suggest that learning conversations 'provide an opportunity to develop a shared and common language for people working together' (General Teaching Council for England, 2004, p. 7).

5.3.2   Professional Development Groups Support Conversational Learning

The current study indicates that through conversation participants had time to talk through a situation or issue that was causing concern, develop a greater understanding of the behaviours they faced, and a deeper understanding of the students that they worked with. Conversation appeared to be at the heart of the process. Participants appreciated the opportunity to share with others their own experiences and knowledge as well as listening to what others might have to say about similar situations. Conversation can be a means of explicit knowledge interaction (Medini, 2006) which can build both tacit and explicit knowledge (Baker, Jensen, & Kolb, 2002). Tacit knowledge is the relatively subjective, personal information that resides in people's heads, deeply rooted in their life experience and learning and difficult to formalise and communicate. Explicit knowledge is the relatively objective, codified knowledge that is deliberately shared, documented and communicated. In order to exchange and share tacit knowledge, members of a Community of Practice also share a common base of mutually understandable and usable knowledge (Medini, 2006) or common language.

Arguably, knowledge and learning are social in nature with knowledge travelling through language. Penuel and Roschelle (1999) suggest that in this context the word social refers to the importance of collaborative, community-based, conversational work in building understanding. The

conversations occurring during the Professional Development Group meetings could be described as learning conversations. Harri-Augstein and Thomas (1991) argue that learning conversations are not just 'chit chat' about disconnected snippets of experience but a sustained activity which creates an increasing awareness of the whole experiential process of learning. They go on to suggest that 'we learn by conversing with ourselves, with others and with the world around us' (p3). Feldman (1999) contends that conversations are a form of inquiry which enable people to 'work through the dilemmas, quandaries and dissonances that relate to their living and being in the world' (p. 137).

Candy, Harri-Augstein and Thomas (1985) define a learning conversation as a 'form of dialogue about a learning experience in which the learner reflects on some event or activity in the past' (p. 102). Analysis of the data from this current study indicates that through conversation participants were able to reflect on issues or concerns that they had and to question their own working practice. Candy *et al* (1985) suggest that reflection very often begins with someone talking over their ideas with another person, and using them as a 'sounding board'. Through learning conversations individuals are able to experience the processes whereby meaning is created. They learn how to learn by 'systematically reflecting upon, and thus expanding, the terms in which they perceive, think, feel and act' (Harri-Augstein & Thomas, 1991, pp. 56-57).

It has been argued that whilst conversations can facilitate learning within organisations, they can also create knowledge itself (Baker, Jensen *et al.*, 2002). Baker, Jenson and Kolb (2002) proposed conversational learning, a learning process whereby learners construct meaning and transform experiences into knowledge through conversations. Grounded in Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984), Baker, Jenson and Kolb (2002) posit that learners construct meaning from their experiences via conversations as they move through the cycle of experiencing, reflecting, abstracting and acting. Others suggest that conversations generate individual and interpersonal understanding. Kayes (2001) describes

conversational learning as a pedagogy that is based on discourse and emphasises the relationship between language and experience: a kind of teasing out experiences through language. Through conversation individual knowledge is made explicit and shared and can become embedded within an organisation's collective memories, structures and processes (Argyris, 1999; Dixon, 1999).

In this study, participants indicated that through the process of reflection their perception of issues or how they viewed a situation could be changed. An example from the focus group interviews indicates that a previously failed strategy may have been attributed to the student rather than looking at alterative reasons for a strategy not being successful or trying something else. It could be suggested that a learning conversation is a planned and systematic approach to professional dialogue that supports teachers to reflect on their practice. As a result the teacher gains new knowledge and uses it to improve his or her teaching (General Teaching Council for England, 2004).

The literature indicates that reflection is vital in pre-service and in-service teacher training for teachers (Kitchenham & Chasteauneuf, 2009). It has been argued that by itself reflection is not necessarily critical (Brookfield, 1995; Ecclestone, 1996; Redmond, 2006). Mezirow (1990) distinguished between reflection and critical reflection. Mezirow suggested that reflection enables us to correct distortions in our beliefs and errors in problem-solving whereas critical reflection involves a critique of the presuppositions on which our beliefs have been built (Mezirow, 1990, p. 1) and questioning existing assumptions, values, and perspectives (Cranton, 1996). Others suggest that critical reflection, as opposed to reflection, refers to how educators become responsible for their actions by learning to challenge their teaching beliefs through critical self-analysis (Korthagen, 1993; Sockman & Sharma, 2008). Yang (2009) suggests that teachers develop a deeper understanding of themselves and their students when they critically reflect on experiences. When questioning is facilitative, this prompts practitioners to go beyond their first thoughts and taken for granted ideas about situations and experiences

and their own actions (or inactions), to critically examine underpinning beliefs, assumptions and values, and to generate and evaluate their own solutions to their own problems (Haigh, 2000).

Brookfield (1994) warns of the potential emotional pitfalls, such as feelings of self-doubt, isolation and uncertainty, which can be experienced by those becoming critically reflective. As such, those who engage in activities to facilitate the development of critical reflection skills must be supported in these efforts (Brookfield, 1994; Brookfield, 1995). I will return to this when I discuss the implications of the current research on page 128.

Clark (2001) suggests that 'conversation groups' become a social context for doing the work of reflective practice. Furthermore authentic conversations make sense of and articulate experiences, implicit theories, hopes, and fears in the intellectual and emotional company of trusted others.

Participants in this study were equally appreciative of the opportunity to share their own insights into what might be going on. They were also positive about being given the opportunity to explain to others why they used certain strategies. They felt that this process helped break down barriers between colleagues and fostered a sense of trust between them. Participants indicated that they valued the emotional support they received as a result of participating in the Professional Development Group meetings. Almost all participants talked about the openness of their colleagues and feeling safe to be able to talk about their issues and concerns. In order for this to occur, trust between the participants was an important factor.

Previous research suggests that for conversational learning to take place, psychological safety is an important factor in the conversational space that supports learning (Wyss-Flamm, 2002). Psychological safety relates to those aspects of the conversational space that promote trust, mutual respect and well-being among group members and so increase the sense of security in togetherness (Roman, 2005; Wyss-Flamm, 2002). Edmondson (1999) suggests that psychological safety is generally taken for granted and not

given direct attention either by individuals or by the team and it is defined as a shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking. There is 'a sense of confidence that others will not embarrass, reject or punish someone for speaking up' (Edmondson, 1999, p. 354). Again, psychological team safety is addressed as an implication later on.

The importance of psychological safety in fostering conversation, and subsequently learning, was demonstrated in this current study as one participant reported being unable to contribute to the conversations either to voice his concerns or to bring up his experiences of working with students due to fear of others judging or not appreciating his views. The act of conversation is argued to be inherently risky as it involves two people understanding each other and questioning our beliefs and assumptions (Gadamer, Weinsheimer, & Marshall, 2004). Psychological safety alleviates excessive concern about others' reactions to actions that have the potential for embarrassment or threat, which learning behaviours often have, thus facilitating learning behaviour in work teams (Edmondson, 1999; Lipshitz, Friedman, & Popper, 2007).

Edmonson (1999) goes on to suggest psychological safety is a group level construct. It is through shared experiences that group members will 'conclude that making a mistake does not lead to rejection when they have had a team experience in which appreciation and interest are expressed in response to discussion of their own and others' mistakes.' Such shared experiences, occurring over time, create the tacit belief that the group is a psychologically safe place (Edmondson, 1999).

It is worth noting that team psychological safety is not the same as group cohesiveness (Edmondson, 2003; Knapp). Janis(1982) suggests that group cohesiveness can reduce willingness to disagree and challenge other people's views.

5.3.3 The Process Of The Meetings Influences Learning

Participants felt that factors regarding the practical aspects of the meetings were important in the success of the Professional Development Group meetings. They commented that it was useful to have a dedicated amount of time to discuss concerns and issues. The literature indicates that in order for critical thinking to occur, people need space and time to connect, so that they can demonstrate trust, effectively communicate aims and beliefs, engage in conversation, correct one another, and reflect on their own thoughts (Cohen & Prusak, 2001; Sockman & Sharma, 2008).

In this study, participants reported that at times, the discussion of issues and concerns could overpower the conversation and they did not feel that the discussion was moving forward. They commented that in a way it was useful to talk about a number of issues or students but ultimately the conversation itself was not very productive.

McDrury and Alterio (2003) described such occasions when the response to one story is another story (response story) rather than dialogue about the original story (response discourse) as 'story hijacking'. A response story is more characteristic of informal settings. In formal settings, processes can be put in place to minimise the occurrence of response stories and maximize dialogue focused on the primary story.

This study's participants appreciated the flexibility of the Professional Development Group meetings. They talked about the meetings being staff led and that they were able to set the agenda through deciding what would be discussed during the meetings. Participants also talked about the need to spend time on the meetings. They believed that over the course of time other members of staff would see the results and more people would feel involved and draw even more people into the Professional Development Groups. In a survey into the prevalence and usefulness of collaborative teacher groups Creese *et al.* (1998) found that rumours in the staff room about the usefulness of a teacher group had led to increased attendance.

Many successful teacher development schemes share common key characteristics (Clarke, 2003; Garet *et al.*, 2001). An overview of the general characteristics that effective professional development programmes have is shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Characteristics Of Effective Professional Development Training Programmes (Baker-Malungu, 2010)

Characteristic	Description
Voluntary	Forced participation very rarely will push change forward. There is far less resistance and a much greater willingness to participate when teachers first determine the value and want to be part of the process.
Peer-led	A far healthier dynamic permeates the professional development programme if the facilitator is viewed as a respected colleague by the participants. This has much more to do with communication style and relationship rather than position and qualification.
Standards-oriented	It is the responsibility of the professional developers to demonstrate and guide good practice in facilitation of their programmes.
Curriculum centred	Theory underpins practice, teacher consider applied theory most relevant. Training programmes should focus on the curriculum being taught; how to enhance its effectiveness and ensure student progress.
Lengthy	Changing practice requires time, participants require enough time to become confident with a new concept before they make a decision about applying it.
Active	Action denotes practice.
Practical	Specific ideas and examples of how to reorganise space, time, materials. Strategies should be ones that teachers can envisage replicating.
Open-ended	Teachers must ultimately determine what is best for them, through demonstration lessons, supportive communication. This will assist them in the decision making process.

5.4 Implications Of The Current Study

Given the paucity of research into the professional development of staff within the FE sector, I sought to investigate the views of staff working at a

Specialist Further Education College following their participation in a Solution-Oriented Professional Development Group.

In the current economic climate, public service delivery is under intense scrutiny, and resources are being reduced. The current Government's spending review in 2010 set out that Local Authorities will face an average loss of grant of 7.25% in each of the next four years (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2010), and the FE resource budget will be reduced by 25%, or £1.1billion (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2010).

It is more important than ever to articulate the distinct contribution that educational psychology has to offer. Norwich (2005) suggests that the challenge for educational psychologists is to be 'innovative in service terms, to ensure a continuing and valued position in this network, with one eye on theoretical-linked and evidence-informed developments, and the other on trends in policy, service and inter-professional work' (p. 387). Cameron (2006) states that applied psychologists can make a distinctive contribution by applying psychology in a creative and innovative way to meet the needs of people and problems that occur in a complex environment.

In the annual remit letter to the Training and Development Agency for Schools, the Department for Education (DfE, 2011) said much of the work associated with teacher training and CPD should be outsourced to schools. The DfE contends that schools should take 'increasing ownership of professional development issues' (2011, p. 2). Similarly, the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (2009) argued that the 'further education workforce should take more responsibility for its own learning, and for assessing its own training needs' (p. 5). The Institute for Learning (2009) contends that it is more important than ever to focus on the professional development of FE teaching staff. The challenge for schools and education providers will be meeting the Continuing Professional Development needs of the staff team with limited resources.

Participants in this study alluded to the notion that staff should take ownership of their professional development. Research indicates that schools that make a success of teachers' continuing professional development take the training of staff as seriously as any organisation in any sector with the 'best schools doing it themselves' (Bassett, Haldenby, Tanner, & Trewhitt, 2010, p. 5). Research indicates that the most frequently named barriers to staff development relate to finance, time and support (Bubb, Earley, & Hempel-Jorgensen, 2008). For educational psychology, it is more important than ever to demonstrate the skills and knowledge it can bring to help educators meet their Continuing Professional Development needs. Bennett and Monsen (2011) contend that Educational Psychologists can work collaboratively with teachers and school staff through consultation and staff support group approaches to help them develop their critical understanding of the psychological processes underpinning their work and solve complex problems. This would enable staff to address issues in a positive way, issues such as cognitive, behavioural and social-emotional issues, including well-being issues that affect some children and young people, which could potentially benefit the greatest number of children and young people.

As previously discussed Brookfield (1994; 1995) cautions that those who engage in activities to facilitate the development of critical reflection skills must be supported in these efforts. Educational psychologists can help facilitate such activities, particularly if the members of a community of practice are not familiar with critical reflection, to help avoid the potential emotional pitfalls which can be experienced by those becoming critically reflective. Educational Psychologists can support and facilitate educators to set up 'psychologically safe' spaces.

Motivational interviewing techniques could be a way to facilitate change, such as learning to think in a critical way. Miller and Rollnick (2002) suggest that motivational interviewing is a way of 'being with people', it is a method of communicating rather than a set of techniques. Motivational interviewing is a way of being with and for people, it is a counselling approach which

incorporates strategies to elicit motivation to change (McNamara, 2009). In their role as a facilitator, an Educational Psychologist can model the skills, such as active listening, empathy, objectivity, being non-judgemental and asking open questions, which are required in order for learning conversations to take place in a psychologically safe space. Figure 11 shows the stages of change that McNamara describes.

Figure 11: The Model Of Stages Of Change (adapted from McNamara, 1992)

Enter

1. Precontemplative: lack of knowledge

6. Relapse:

2. Contemplative:

5. Maintenance:

3. Determinism:

Exit

Exit

4. Active Change:
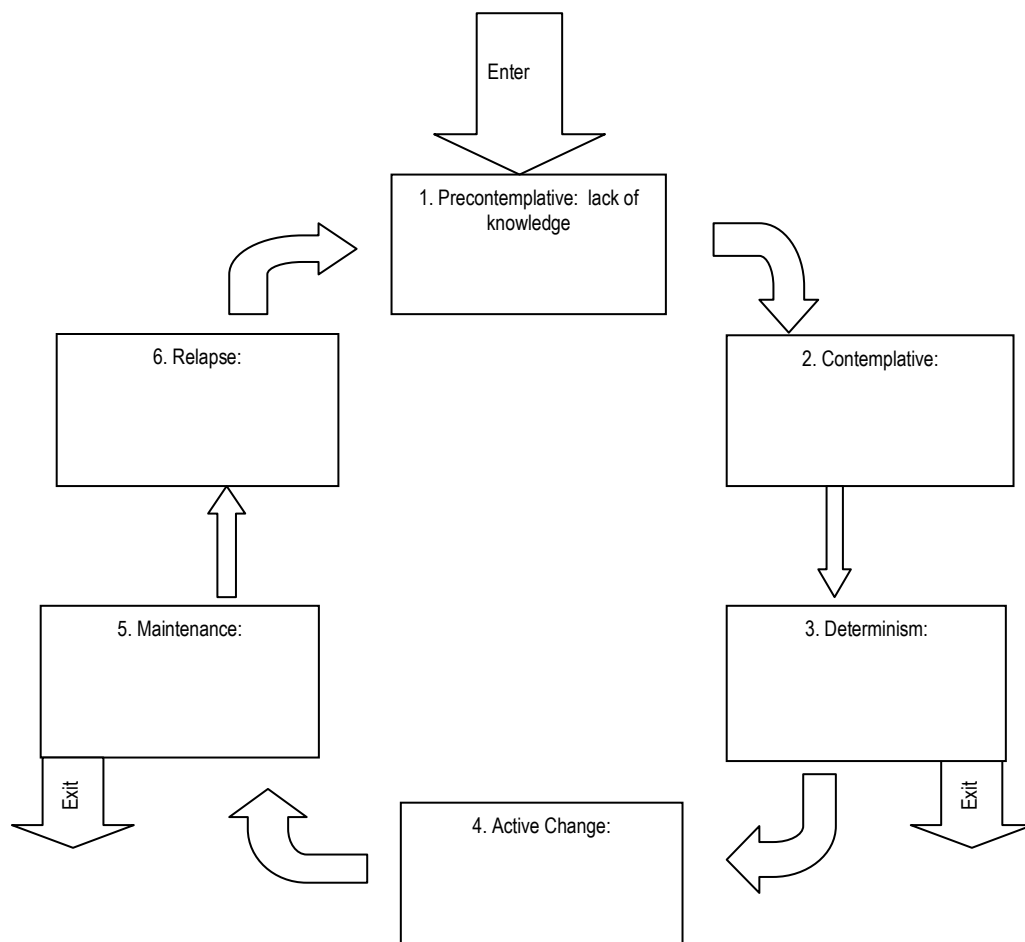
The Constructionist Model of Informed Reasoned Action (COMOIRA) is another framework that could be utilised to help people make sense of and manage change processes at the individual, group, systems or organisational level (Claridge, Gameson, Rhydderch, Parry, & Griffey, 2008).

Figure 12: COMOIRA - The Constructionist Model Of Informed, Reasoned Action (Gameson & Rhydderch, 2008)

The framework comprises a core set of principles, concepts and theories and eight key decision points (Gameson & Rhydderch, 2008). Gameson and Rhydderch explain that the framework comprises a core set of principles, concepts and theories and eight key decision points. A series of reflective and reflexive questions support the framework and these are designed to help practitioners think about the issues associated with change. The framework is flexible as the sequence can start at any point, follow any path, include any number of key decision points and, if needed, repeat key decision points.

A further facilitator role would be to monitor the conversation to avoid 'story hijacking' (McDrury & Alterio, 2003). Participants in the current study indicated that at times the focus of the conversation could be taken over by members of the group talking about similar issues. They felt the conversation would have benefitted from moving on to solution generation at an earlier stage.

In a recent appraisal of the literature into various staff support groups Bennett and Monsen (2011) conclude that there is limited empirical research in the area of approaches to support problem-solving skills in schools. They further suggest that the majority of evidence is in the form of case studies and anecdotes. However, Lom and Sullenger (2011) suggest that to gain access to insights about self-directed, informal professional development it is important for teachers to be able to talk about their experiences as planners, implementers and researchers of professional development. Furthermore, these accounts can be a 'critical step in validating such experiences as acceptable alternatives to sanctioned, formal professional development' (Lom & Sullenger, 2011, p. 72). Bennett and Monsen (2011) maintain that it is vital that an empirical research base for this work is now established, as the use of problem-solving groups within educational settings is now into its fourth decade. Baxter and Fredrickson (2005) argue that Educational Psychologists are likely to be 'among the best qualified professional groups to undertake research and development, training and supervision of staff who are delivering services directly to promote the life chances of children and young people' (p. 99). Furthermore, teachers will be better placed to meet the needs of the children if the teacher's own needs have been supported.

Educational Psychologists can add maximum value by targeting their work at a staff level which will have an impact on a wider range of children and young people (Baxter & Frederickson, 2005). Miller (2003) refers to the positive impact that working with staff groups can have on the staff culture; shifting perspectives and enabling staff to approach problem situations more analytically and less emotionally.

This study did not set out to test any hypotheses, rather my aim was to try and offer some insight in to the use of an alternative CPD activity for staff at SFEC College.

Participants valued the opportunity to talk to their colleagues; their comments suggest that they appreciated the time to just talk to one another. As one participant commented "we don't get that much opportunity to just to sit and talk about the students". This dedicated time set aside enabled staff to be able to talk about and reflect on challenging situations before any problem solving could take place.

Through conversation participants were not only able to develop their working practice but their comments suggest that their self-efficacy may have increased as they gained validation and confidence in their own abilities to cope with challenging situations.

5.5 Future Research

From this current study a distinctive model of the impact of a Professional Development Group has emerged and from this some additional avenues for future research have been identified.

Whilst the information from the use of the TSES was omitted from this study, it would be interesting to explore the links between Professional Development Group take up and the self-efficacy of staff. For example, do staff with higher levels of perceived self-efficacy more readily engage with professional development opportunities?

In addition to this, some observations have been made of the relationship between conversational learning and practical outcomes. Further exploration of the mechanisms underlying the dynamic aspects of this may be useful. For example, how does conversational learning lead to the development of practical outcomes?

5.6   Reflections On The Research Process

5.6.1   Use Of A Grounded Theory Approach

During the initial stages of the research I was interested in finding out about the self-efficacy beliefs of the staff working in a Specialist Further Education College. However, as the nature of qualitative research is flexible and the study design was iterative, the data collection and research questions were adjusted according to what was learned (Mack *et al.*, 2005). As the Professional Development Group meetings progressed I became more interested in the perceptions of staff in relation to their participation in this type of Continuing Professional Development activity.

Methodology selection was a significant factor in this study. As the study was about exploring, understanding and making sense of participants' experience of participating in a novel Continuing Professional Development activity, I was, essentially, interpreting an observed social reality. My purpose was not to verify an existing theory or test a hypothesis by using quantitative data, but to discover, conceptualise and explore the meaning by using words. I therefore chose a Grounded Theory approach, an inductive, qualitative approach, to increase the chances of discovering unanticipated factors and discovering the impact, challenges and implications of informal self-directed professional development. The use of a Grounded Theory approach and the flexibility of a qualitative research methodology enabled me to query at every part of the process what might be occurring and change the research questions as I progressed. I did find it challenging to write in the style of a Grounded Theory approach, in particular the concept development stage as this was a novel way of reporting my findings.

Grounded Theory is not without limits. In Chapter 4, page 94, I clarified the notion of establishing rigour in this study, rather than 'validity' and 'reliability'. To try and ensure, as far as possible, what I see as the quality of the research I discussed the techniques and methods I used, such as constant comparison, 'negative' case analysis, participant checks, persistent

observation, and member checking. However, it has to be acknowledged that my dual role as a practitioner-researcher is likely to have had some influence on the outcomes of the research through my interactions.

There has been considerable debate over whether qualitative and quantitative methods can and should be assessed according to the same quality criteria (Mays & Pope, 2000). Altheide and Johnson (1994) suggest that the social world is socially constructed, therefore, meanings and definitions produced as part of the research process are socially produced through communication and dialogue. Some argue that qualitative research represents a distinctive paradigm that cannot be judged by conventional measures of validity, generalisability and reliability that are relatively well established in quantitative research (Mays & Pope, 2000). The belief that there is a single, unequivocal social reality or truth which is entirely independent of the researcher and of the research process is rejected. Instead, there are multiple perspectives of the world that are created and constructed in the research process.

Yardley (2000) explains that the traditional criteria of employing a representative sample, to develop reliable measures, or to yield objective findings or replicable outcomes are not applicable to qualitative research.

Yardley goes on to suggest adopting new criteria for determining reliability and validity of qualitative research. The characteristics of good qualitative research that she proposes are shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Characteristics Of Good (Qualitative) Research (Yardley, 2000)

Essential Qualities	Examples	What I did
• Sensitivity to context	• Theoretical, relevant literature; empirical data; sociocultural setting; participants' perspectives; ethical issues.	• Initial literature search directed theoretical sampling and awareness of existing theory/literature. Awareness of the impact of socio-cultural influences on the relationship between the participants and me. Ethical issues addressed on page 63 Data sampling conducted so that
• Commitment and rigour	• In-depth engagement with topic; methodological competence/skill; thorough data collection; depth/breadth of analysis	• Competencies and skills developed to use Grounded Theory. Constant comparison, 'negative case analysis, participant checks, persistent observation, and member checking to ensure rigour.
• Transparency and coherence	• Clarity and power of description/argument; transparent methods and data presentation; fit between theory and method; reflexivity.	• Clear description of the data collection process and analysis of data. Acknowledgement of my role in the research and my interactions might have some influence on the outcomes of the research.
• Impact and importance	• Theoretical (enriching understanding); sociocultural; practical (for community, policy makers, education workers).	• Concept development and implications of the research detailed in chapter 5. Impact and importance will ultimately be judged by those for whom the findings are deemed relevant.

5.6.2 Reflecting On The Ethical Considerations Of Research

During a supervision session, the possibly self-serving nature of ethical considerations in relation to research was commented upon by my thesis supervisor. At times, it appears that the ethics of conducting research may be focussed on protecting the researcher rather than the participants. Brown (1997) suggests that the view that professional ethics should be about a discipline's moral implications, or the harmful and beneficial effects of theories and practices on individuals and societies is a naïve one. Brown argues that codes of ethics devised by organisations of professionals protect the professional at least as much as they protect the public.

It is important that researchers and ethics committees consider the impact of beneficence and non-maleficence and to evaluate potential benefits versus risks to participants. Benefits to participants can include access to an intervention which is beneficial and could 'increase in knowledge and esteem resulting from interaction with a non-judgmental and impartial researcher' (Kingston University, 2010, p. 4).

I reflected on the Professional Development Group meetings that I facilitated during the research process and the manager of SFEC reported that the feedback from some of the participants had been positive. Furthermore, some participants had queried whether they would continue as they found them useful in developing their knowledge and professional practice. From the outset, I had intended to continue with the Professional Development Groups in some form, though, time constraints and a lack of resources have prevented me this for now. Could my actions be seen as causing harm, or 'maleficence'? Fox and Prilleltensky (1997) argue that detrimental outcomes in psychology do not necessarily reflect malevolent intent by psychologists. However, participants in this study could potentially have been 'left hanging' after experiencing an intervention that they may have found useful.

5.6.3 Reflections On The Research Journey

At the start of my doctoral journey, how I viewed the world and how we find out about it was vastly different from where I am now. Reflecting on a conversation that I had at the start of the process with my thesis supervisor it was highlighted that I was very much aligned with the positivist standpoint – that facts or knowledge is transmitted and communicated from one person to another.

Since starting the doctoral course, my beliefs and preconceived ideas of education and learning have been robustly challenged. Whilst I very early on acknowledged that knowledge and meaning making is subjective and that there are multiple realities of an observed event, I have at times found it very difficult to reconcile myself with this. I reported previously that I found it challenging to write in the style of a Grounded Theory approach, in particular the concept development stage. Writing in this way challenged me to report what I believed was occurring, to 'conceptualise a theory'. I still feel that this is something that I will always find challenging, however, without going through the process, progress and change would not have occurred.

5.7   Closing Thoughts

The aim of this study was to explore the thoughts and feelings of staff at a Specialist Further Education College after participating in a Professional Development Group. I also wanted to explore whether the meetings supported staff with their professional development and helped develop their working practice. The nature in which this development occurred was another avenue of interest.

Overall, participants were positive about the function of the Professional Development Group. The meetings facilitated colleagues to engage in conversations that are not normally possible in their daily work. They were a

forum in which colleagues could openly discuss issues, to listen to what their colleagues had to say and to gain insight or develop their own working practice. The learning conversations that occurred provided access to sources of ideas, materials, feedback, solace and encouragement crucial for both survival in the classroom and professional growth.

Given the changing FE landscape, there is a clear need for flexibility of Continuing Professional Development delivery along with effective professional development choices. Whilst further research into this area is needed, this study hopefully has helped clarify what Continuing Professional Development activities are helpful.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Profile Of SFEC College

Specialist Further Education College (SFEC) provides education for young people between the ages of 16 and 25 with an Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) many of whom have additional or associated complex needs. The college has been open since 1995 and currently provides programmes of study for over 100 students.

Programmes of study are individually tailored and based upon students' specific needs and interests. All students follow the SFEC College curriculum which is based on realistic goals and prepares each student for life beyond college. Individual support and guidance is provided for each student including 1:1 support when required. All students also have access to ESPA's multi-disciplinary team if required.

The College curriculum focuses on teaching:

- Social Communication Skills

- Emotional Literacy

- Behaviour Self-Management.

The Curriculum also includes:

- Skills for Life

- Creative and Expressive Arts

- Literacy, Numeracy and ICT

- Media Studies

- Independence

- Leisure Skills

- Employability Skills

Some students also attend General Further Educational (GFE) colleges to access specific qualifications and vocational awards.

Appendix 2: Staff Profiles Of Participants

Participant	Grade	Time employed at SFEC
1	Tutor	2 years
2	Learning Support Assistant	6 years
3	Tutor	4 years
4	Learning Support Assistant	1 year
5	Learning Support Assistant	6 months
6	Learning Support Assistant	2 years
7	Tutor	5 years
8	Tutor	8 years
9	Tutor	2 years
10	Learning Support Assistant	1 year
11	Tutor	8 years
12	Tutor	5 years

Appendix 3: College Teacher Efficacy Scale

Name: _____

College Staff Sense of Efficacy Scale

College Staff Beliefs	**How much can you do?**								
Directions: This questionnaire is designed to help us gain a better understanding of the kinds of things that create difficulties for staff in their college activities. Please indicate your opinion about each of the statements below. Your answers are confidential.	Nothing		Very Little		Some Influence		Quite A Bit		A Great Deal
1. How much can you do to get through to the most difficult students?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
2. How much can you do to help your students think critically?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
3. How much can you do to control disruptive behaviour in the session?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
4. How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in college work?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
5. To what extent can you make your expectations clear about student behaviour?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
6. How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in college work?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
7. How well can you respond to difficult questions from your students?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
8. How well can you establish routines to keep activities running smoothly?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
9. How much can you do to help your students value learning?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
10. How much can you gauge student comprehension of what you have/is being taught?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
11. To what extent can you craft good questions for your students?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
12. How much can you do to foster student creativity?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
13. How much can you do to get students to follow session/college rules?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
14. How much can you do to improve the understanding of a student who is failing?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
15. How much can you do to calm a student who is disruptive or noisy?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
16. How well can you establish a classroom management system with each group of students?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
17. How much can you do to adjust your session to the proper level for individual students?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
18. How much can you use a variety of assessment strategies?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
19. How well can you keep a few problem students from ruining an entire session?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
20. To what extent can you provide an alternative explanation or example when students are confused?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
21. How well can you respond to defiant students?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
22. How much can you assist families in helping their children do well in college?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
23. How well can you implement alternative strategies in your session?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
24. How well can you provide appropriate challenges for very capable students?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)

Appendix 4: Letter To Non-Participants

To All:

As part of my research for university I have been conducting some training meetings with 2 groups of staff. Whilst you have not been participating in the training I would greatly appreciate you completing the enclosed questionnaire as it will inform the research process and the analysis of any data that I gather. As it states on the information sheet, any information that is gathered is kept confidential and will not be seen by anyone other than myself. If you have any questions about the research and how the information will be used, I can be contacted at the Cloisters. If you are happy to complete the questionnaire for my research, please could you sign the enclosed consent form and return it, along with the completed questionnaire, to me in the Cloisters.

Many thanks for your help:

Marti Mo

Appendix 5: Information For Non-Participants

<u>**INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS**</u>

Some personal data will be taken in the questionnaire; however, this is only data relating to your work as a member of staff for the College. I shall not ask for any other personal data.

Under the Data Protection Act (1998), I can only use data I gather for the purposes of this research, which is to answer my (current) overall research question:

> *What is the impact of a professional development group on staff working at a Specialist College?*

You will only be involved in this research with your full informed consent. You may withdraw from the research at any time, without giving any reason for doing so, and without consequence

Your involvement in this research comprises participation in pre training questionnaires.

I shall send you a copy of your questionnaire, if you wish, once the research is complete.

Whilst you will not be participating in the Professional Development Group, your responses in the pre-training questionnaire will be valuable as it will guide the development of a professional development group format to roll out across the College. Once the research into the initial professional development group is complete you may be offered the opportunity to participate in a modified Professional Development Group within which you will have an opportunity to share and reflect as a group the issues that occur when working with students. Participation in the professional development

group will count towards the number of hours CPD that all members of staff have to log.

The proposal upon which this research is based has been accepted by the academic board of Newcastle University.

Manual data will be stored in a locked facility when not under the direct supervision of the researcher. This includes notes and other paper files. Digital data will be kept on a secure, password protected system. Research data will be backed up regularly and back up files will be kept on a secure drive.

Steps will be taken to preserve you anonymity in this research project.

The final results of the research, or any resulting statistics, will not identify individuals. Care will be taken even when data is aggregated or anonymised.

The data gathered and analysed in this research will not be kept for longer than is necessary, however, research data must be kept for a period defined by Newcastle University. Once the research is completed, the digital and manual data will be kept in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998).

If you wish to contact me about any aspect of the research please feel free to do so. I can be contacted:

> By telephone on: 0191 5102600
> By email at: m.c.w.mo@ncl.ac.uk

Should you wish to contact the University, the supervising tutor is:

> Richard Parker (Educational Psychology Academic and Professional Tutor)
> School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences
> King George VI Building

Newcastle University

Queen Victoria Street

Newcastle

NE1 7RU

Tel: 0191 222 6588

richard.parker@ncl.ac.uk

Signing this document:

By signing the below, you are agreeing to participate in a research study. Please be sure that any questions have been answered to your satisfaction and that you have a thorough understanding of the study. A copy of this document will be given to you after signing.

Participant's signature:

Print name: Date:

Researcher's signature:

Print name: Date:

Appendix 6: Teachers' Sense Of Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfook Hoy, 2001)

Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale[1] (long form)

Teacher Beliefs	How much can you do?								
Directions: This questionnaire is designed to help us gain a better understanding of the kinds of things that create difficulties for teachers in their school activities. Please indicate your opinion about each of the statements below. Your answers are confidential.	Nothing	Very Little		Some Influence		Quite A Bit		A Great Deal	
1. How much can you do to get through to the most difficult students?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
2. How much can you do to help your students think critically?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
3. How much can you do to control disruptive behavior in the classroom?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
4. How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in school work?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
5. To what extent can you make your expectations clear about student behavior?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
6. How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in school work?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
7. How well can you respond to difficult questions from your students ?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
8. How well can you establish routines to keep activities running smoothly?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
9. How much can you do to help your students value learning?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
10. How much can you gauge student comprehension of what you have taught?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
11. To what extent can you craft good questions for your students?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
12. How much can you do to foster student creativity?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
13. How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
14. How much can you do to improve the understanding of a student who is failing?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
15. How much can you do to calm a student who is disruptive or noisy?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
16. How well can you establish a classroom management system with each group of students?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
17. How much can you do to adjust your lessons to the proper level for individual students?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
18. How much can you use a variety of assessment strategies?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
19. How well can you keep a few problem students form ruining an entire lesson?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
20. To what extent can you provide an alternative explanation or example when students are confused?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
21. How well can you respond to defiant students?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
22. How much can you assist families in helping their children do well in school?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
23. How well can you implement alternative strategies in your classroom?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
24. How well can you provide appropriate challenges for very capable students?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)

Appendix 7: Information For Participants

INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS

Some personal data will be taken in the questionnaire; however, this is only data relating to your work as a member of staff for the College. I will not ask for any other personal data.

Under the Data Protection Act (1998), I can only use data I gather for the purposes of this research, which is to answer my (current) overall research question:

> *What is the impact of a professional development group on staff working at a Specialist College?*

You will only be involved in this research with your full informed consent. You can withdraw from the research at any time, without giving any reason for doing so, and without consequence.

Your involvement in this research comprises of participation in pre and post training questionnaires; plus monthly professional development meetings lasting approximately 1 hour.

I shall send you a copy of your questionnaires, if you wish, once the research is complete.

There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this research. The benefits for you could include an opportunity to share and reflect as a group the issues that occur when working with students and to share in the development of a professional development group format to roll out across the College. Participation in the Professional Development Group will count towards the number of hours CPD that all members of staff have to log.

The proposal upon which this research is based has been accepted by the academic board of Newcastle University.

Manual data will be stored in a locked facility when not under the direct supervision of the researcher. This includes notes and other paper files. Digital data will be kept on a secure, password protected system. Research data will be backed up regularly and back up files will be kept on a secure drive.

Steps will be taken to preserve you anonymity in this research project; however there may be times I may quote some of your responses verbatim. You will not be identified through these verbatim reports.

The final results of the research, or any resulting statistics, will not identify individuals. Care will be taken even when data is aggregated or anonymised.

The data gathered and analysed in this research will not be kept for longer than is necessary, however, research data must be kept for a period defined by Newcastle University. Once the research is completed, the digital and manual data will be kept in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998).

If you wish to contact me about any aspect of the research please feel free to do so. I can be contacted:

> By telephone on: 0191 5102600
> By email at: m.c.w.mo@ncl.ac.uk

Should you wish to contact the University, the supervising tutor is:

> Richard Parker (Educational Psychology Academic and Professional Tutor)
> School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences
> King George VI Building
> Newcastle University

Queen Victoria Street

Newcastle

NE1 7RU

Tel: 0191 222 6588

richard.parker@ncl.ac.uk

Signing this document:

By signing the below, you are agreeing to participate in a research study. Please be sure that any questions have been answered to your satisfaction and that you have a thorough understanding of the study. A copy of this document will be given to you after signing.

Participant's signature:

Print name: Date:

Researcher's signature:

Print name: Date:

Appendix 8: Types Of Qualitative Data Collection

Observations

Observations enable the researcher to describe existing situations. Data can be collected by an external observer, referred to as a non-participant observer. Or the data can be collected by a participant observer where the researcher aims to become part of the population being studied. Participant observation enables researchers to observe and participate in activities of the people under study to learn about them in their natural setting (Willig, 2008). The researcher engages in a variety of activities including participation, documentation, informal interviewing and reflection.

Participant observation is almost always used with other qualitative methods, such as interviews and focus groups. Observation methods are useful to researchers in a variety of ways. It enables a researcher to gain insight in to the physical, social, cultural, and economic contexts in which study participants live; the relationships between people, contexts, ideas, norms, and events; and behaviours and acti   vities – what people do, how frequently, and with whom, or check for nonverbal expression of feelings (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005). Through participant observation the researchers can check definitions of terms that participants use in interviews, observe events that informants may be unable or unwilling to share, and observe situations informants have described in interviews.

Observations can be useful during the research period to help determine whether the project is being delivered and operated as planned. During the summative phase of the research, observations can be used to determine whether or not the project is successful.

Several advantages and disadvantages have been highlighted in relation to the use of participant observation. The advantages of participant observation include:

- Important factors, previously unknown to the researcher, that are crucial for research design, data collection and interpretation of other data.

- Direct information about the behaviour of individuals and groups can be gathered.

- The researcher is given permission to enter into and understand the situation/context.

- Data is collected from natural, unstructured, and flexible setting

- The researcher can learn about things that participants are unwilling or unable to discuss in an interview or focus group.

The disadvantages of participant observation include:

- The process can be time consuming.

- Being observed may affect the behaviour of the participants. The observed behaviour may be atypical.

- Perception of the researcher is subjective and may distort the data.

- Difficulty documenting the data. Documentation relies on memory, personal discipline, and diligence of researcher.

Interviews

Interviews enable a researcher to capture the perspectives of participants. Interviews can be distinguished between the degree of structure or

standardisation of the interview. Less structured interviews allows for more flexibility of response (Robson, 2002). Robson (2002) distinguishes between three types:

- Fully structured interview: has pre-determined questions in a pre-set order, a type of questionnaire.

- Semi-structured interview: has pre-determined questions, however, the order of the questions are flexible and based on the researcher's perception as to what seems more appropriate. The wording of the questions can be changed and explanations can be given to clarify what is being asked. Depending to the responses of the participant, some questions can be omitted, or additional ones be added.

- Unstructured interview: the researcher has a general area if interest but allows the conversation to develop. The interviewer encourages free and open responses in an attempt to capture the perceptions of participants in their own words. This enables the researcher to present the meaningfulness of the experience from the participant's perspective. In-depth interviews can be conducted with individuals or with a small group of individuals, a focus group. Focus groups have been covered within the main body of the thesis.

King (1994, cited in Robson, 2002) suggests that interviews can be used in a variety of situation:

- Where a study focuses on a particular phenomenon.

- Where individual historical accounts of how a particular phenomenon developed.

- Where exploratory work is required before a quantitative study can be carried out.

- Where qualitative data is required following a quantitative study in order to validate, clarify or illustrate the findings.

Several advantages and disadvantages have been highlighted in relation to the use of interviews. The advantages include:

- The interview is flexible.

- Rich data, details and new insights can be gathered.

- It allows face-to-face contact with participants.

- It enables the researcher to explore topics in depth.

- The researcher can explore the affective as well as cognitive aspects of responses

- The researcher can explain or clarify questions, increasing the likelihood of useful responses

The disadvantages of using interviews include:

- The process can be time-consuming.

- The researcher could distort information through recall error

- Perception of the researcher is subjective and may distort the data.

- Flexibility can result in inconsistencies across interviews.

- The volume of data generated can be large and may be difficult to transcribe and reduce.

Appendix 9: Transcript Of The Evaluation Meeting For Professional Development Group 1

- *Right I just really wanted to get everyone together just to talk about the training we did. I know things happened and we couldn't get together more often but for part of my research is to see what you thought about the process, if you felt that it was beneficial, if you felt that there was something that you didn't find helpful and what could be changed because I think the idea was, well it was September last year, was that if it was successful it would be rolled across all College sites, across the College as a whole, for staff to come together to chat about and use the process and chat about any issues that arose. OK? So I suppose, what did everyone think the purpose of the monthly meetings were?*

To discuss behaviours and how people deal with certain things.

Sort of strategising and strategies.

That was the first impression I got from my first meeting.

- *That was the idea, that was the theory.*

I think they were a good idea.

I think it should be a monthly thing really.

- *Right.*

I mean the behaviours are not as bad as they were.

We do still get them and its still, you know, if you haven't got that student and then you go into a session that has got that student in you then understand what to do.

But its also break times and lunch times aswell, because what works with one could possibility work with somebody else but sometimes it doesn't because they haven't got that relationship so it is good to see what other, how other people deal with it.

It's good to see what different approaches people take in certain situations with certain students because you might take one approach and it might not work and you think 'oh well' its him and leave it. But another person has a different approach that you might try and it might work but then again if there's two people with the same kind of problem, behaviour, [?] maybe more individual.

- *So what you're saying is that it was good to just share ideas and find out what other people were doing so you could try it for yourself.*

[Murmurs of agreement.]

- *Right OK. So what about the format of the meeting, in the very, when we first met up initially I quickly went through the process or the framework that we were going to use. Can everyone remember what the process, what the framework was?*

Vaguely

- *I'll quickly go through it. It was four steps. The first stage was to describe and clarify the issue. Somebody would bring along an issue or talk about a concern that they had and that person would talk about their concern and the other members of the group would only ask clarification questions to get a bit more insight. Next stage was reflection. So once the concern is, you know once you've talked about the concern other members of the group might give examples of similar experiences, either with the same student or with different students who presented similar sorts of behaviour. The next stage was theory generating so the members of the group would put together what they thought was going on with that student, what their theories were. And then the final stage was strategy generating, so it was looking for different solutions or strategies that people might be able to try or use or think about. So that was the four stage process, so what are people, what do people think about the process that was used? I mean the initial question is do you think that process or that framework was used in the sessions, in the meetings.*

I think the first one it was, well I mean I've only been in the first one but I think that one it was. Because we looked at a certain person and then we looked at why they were doing that, and then looked at the way different people dealt with it, so yeah, I would have thought so.

- *What about the other sessions?*

Yeah they were quite good. But I think sometimes we tended to go off in a tangent didn't we.

Yeah. It was hard to keep track.

It was hard to keep, sort of strict framework

Framework kind of started too…

We would jump from student to student aswell instead of just staying on one or two.

- *Right so did you find that because we were jumping, I mean this was something that was brought up with the other group aswell, did you find that jumping from student to student or going off on tangents was it helpful or not helpful?*

Not helpful it kind of blurred, blurred the framework.

I think we need to be disciplined, one student and one student only.

Because then you're sorting it out aren't you. You're sorting that problem out instead of going onto another one and not getting over what strategies or how…I mean, we did do that sometimes and talk about the strategies but sometimes we didn't…

Same as before, you can't have one strategy for a group of people, you have to have a strategy for different students.

Because they're individual, yeah.

So if you're talking about three or four people you can't have a strategy for every single one.

I mean three different people can have the same behaviour but different strategies.

What if at meetings you talk about students, just two or three of ones that you were going to talk about and stay with those and the next one talk about ones.

-   *That's really interesting that because right at the beginning when I introduced what we were going to do I did actually say that it wasn't necessarily going to be one particular student that we were going to focus on it could be that if we were seeing similar behaviours in a few students then it could be that we could discuss strategies around that but you guys are actually saying that wasn't very helpful, it was more, in the other group aswell, they actually suggested, like you were saying to be more focused and just to focus on mainly on one individual.*

Because if you use one approach to like say two different behaviours it might not work you got to tailor what kind of action you take to one behaviour, it just depends because as Kate says people can't have the same behaviours, sometimes you might want to use the same…

There was that tendency to jump from one student to another and I think, sometimes we talk between ourselves obviously in spare moments, de-briefing, and the fact is, I think it would be so helpful to have at the end of, you know what you're studying a framework that every member of staff could work towards, towards a certain behaviour because we all deal with it in such different ways as individuals ourselves we approach problems in different ways don't we, problem solve in different ways, but at the end your studies if you say had a certain you know sort of behaviour from, not necessarily a student, but a kind of behaviour what do you expect as SFEC, or where, I'm not sure what angle you're coming from, we should treat students with certain behaviours in certain ways. I mean we come from different backgrounds don't we, so we do as a rule react differently.

I think sometimes though aswell with that though it all depends on your relationship with that student aswell.

I think that makes a big, big difference, if you're spending more time with them, you know then, pick up, you build up a relationship but if you're just in there once or twice…

I mean its alright to say pack in to someone they might just do it straight away but if someone else says it, it might take, you've got to look at them as individuals as well as the behaviour, because if you don't do that you see you can't just use one approach it won't work with different people.

-   *So did you feel that the sessions were useful in, or could, could use the sessions get to know the students a bit better, find out what makes them tick or try and understand you know if they are exhibiting certain behaviours what it is they're trying to say or what it is that they're trying to get across.*

Well I think in the meetings aswell you get, especially if you don't know the students and then you listen to others who've had them in their session, I mean they're quite good to get their point of view on what the student's personality is like as well.

A piece of paper doesn't tell you everything, people are watching, and experience in what they're like.

That's really handy as well because like you say sometimes the students behave differently to different people and also in different sessions, so then you will be talking and someone will go, 'oh Ashley has been an absolute nightmare and he wouldn't do this, or he wouldn't do that' or whatever, but then I'll be like, 'but he's been super in my session', so there's obviously something, you know what is it that's making him behave like that, I think that's good because we don't get that much opportunity to just to sit and talk about the students do we?

No, no, and I think that should happen a bit more.

And it's helpful.

We used to have behaviour meetings but that doesn't happen anymore.

- *That was actually mentioned in the other group aswell.*

It would be handy.

Didn't allocate time, just sort of pass and go oh blah, blah, blah. So it was good that we had the time, it was allocated.

More formal.

It's only when someone does something naughty or whatever.

And it's only when something happens you'll say, what's such and such like in the classroom.

It should be logged, changes in behaviour in certain individuals, and if certain approaches stop working you should log that aswell, and change your tact.

And a few of them are settling in, I don't know if you agree, its testing the boundaries, we've had a few starting at the beginning of term, we're getting used to them and they're getting used to us but then there's a few who started who are pushing the boundaries.

Yeah.

And they're also trying, not just fit in with us as tutors or staff but they're also trying to fit in with their peers so you've got to have a strong understanding.

- *There was something there about, and the other group mentioned it aswell, you used to have these behaviour meetings which served a similar sort of purpose from what I understand, just talking about the different students what you might see, how you might actually work with them if you did see certain behaviours but that doesn't happen anymore.*

No.

- And there's something there about needing a dedicated set time that's protected for you to do that.

To flag up.

It's just finding time, sometimes it's hard getting everyone together.

Yeah because everyone's either out GFEing or something.

And you just find one or two individuals, saying 'oh yes I experienced that', nothings really written down.

I don't know if we mentioned young Richard, who just started sitting in a corner eating his sandwich yesterday.

It's one of his goals isn't it not too.

He will sit in a chair but it has to be a lower chair.

Yes but I asked him to come in with his sandwich because its not healthy sitting on the floor with a sandwich in the hallway so why don't you come into the art room and he knelt.

He will sit in a smaller chair, he can't sit in a chair this high because he's got a serious problem with his…

Another thing with these meeting aswell, what happens is you, the ones we used to have before we did look at different strategies but there wasn't anything like why they were doing it, it was just like that was the behaviour, what strategies are people using, and that was our behaviour meeting. But there wasn't really any mention of any triggers, or what might be happening for that behaviour to be happening. It was just that was the behaviour they were displaying, what strategies are people using and that was our behaviour meetings, but I think what's useful is why do you think they're behaving like that, I think that it was useful to have that incorporated aswell, what the triggers are.

The behaviour triggers and solutions, strategies….

The thing is the triggers, they can, the triggers can be like anything. You know, it could be like things like what's going on [bad sound quality], the environment or the teaching, the session or something going on at home.

I think it would be really beneficial if at the beginning of term we got all the behaviour stuff and we sat down and read it together and talked about it, got to know who everyone was because we still now, I don't know anything about the first year

I don't either.

So basically they'll come into you session and they could do anything which in one way is good because sometimes if you know stuff about the students you're they'll come in and do this, you don't know how to act with them or behave but then sometimes you know nothing, so that's lacking quite a lot.

- *Right so there's something about protecting time so its actually on the timetable and its not taking away from you, to have a discussion, what about the amount of time we spent talking about the issues.*

I don't think it hurts honestly, I really don't.

I think it would be good if we covered all the students aswell, generally we only cover the ones who are causing any bother, where as the ones who don't cause any bother for example Anthony he doesn't, he's inoffensive but he doesn't come to your sessions, don't know why.

He's displaying challenging behaviour in his own way isn't he?

He just gets forgotten doesn't he, that would be really good, just, we could cover everybody.

It because he's really little as well.

And he keeps lashing off, so it's like silent challenging behaviour.

I've had him one to one for the term, so far until last week, and I had Carl, Steve, Ellis and the new one Jack, and Kirsty will not stop talking and Anthony had to leave the room, I understood that why because he can't stand the noise so there must be a strategy around that, apart from telling them be quiet, but I just don't know what triggers that behaviour.

Well they're all got challenging behaviour some way or another.

Some are quieter than others.

Well being quiet is challenging behaviour, especially if they don't answer you.

It is one to one, well in [?], I've got Carl not saying not a word almost.

- *So there's something there about this being more useful at the beginning of the year just so that people can talk about the students that are coming in, talking about what you might see, why they might be behaving in a certain way and then looking around the different strategies, right ok. So I mean I keep going back to the format of the meetings but I would like to know about the framework itself whether or not it is useful, did you think that the way that we used it, yes there were the four separate stages and we might have bounced backwards and forward between them, but did you think that it was structured enough the way the meetings were actually run or did you think that we spent too much time talking about issues or not enough time talking about.*

I think there was time spent going off the agenda.

- *Right so they need to be, a bit more structured, not structured but focused.*

Well focused on what it is.

Really going into ins and outs of actual incidents of what happened, the incident, ins and outs of the behaviour, the trigger and then talking for ages [?]

- *Right OK it does actually need somebody, you know when everyone's talking about students and going off in tangents, someone to bring a reign in on it.*

Yeah.

- *So it does need somebody, someone in the other group mentioned writing things down, where people were at, what we had actually discussed, like some sort of visual recording of what was actually being said or like minutes, like a flip chart.*

That would be hard though.

If you take minutes and you do go off in tangents its just going to be reams and reams of minutes, just basic key points like 'behaviour triggers'.

But that would be good if you did it on a flip chart because you could say 'I'm only going to write the key points' and then you're gong to keep people on top.

That would be a good way to keep people on focus.

- *OK so we've already touched on what you found useful about the meetings, so it was a case of people talking about sharing ideas and talking about the different experiences that they've had with the students.*

Sort of like a de-brief aswell isn't it? Getting things off you chest.

Yeah.

It's better because you don't have hearsay, someone said this and well I didn't say that, if you're in the meeting and recording it you can say we discussed this and this is the strategy we came up with, rather than someone just say 'Lisa said this' or we tried it and it didn't work, I think its better this way.

- *So you could actually discuss things out in the open rather than other people saying, they said this or said that.*

Yeah I was talking to Lisa last week, this morning, just record it.

- *Do you think there was anything else you found useful about the meetings?*

I thought it was useful that, I remember one of the meetings we were talking about Graeme being a total smartarse in your session and he would tell the other students what to do and be really bossy and things like that, and I think that's really good because I know he was being difficult in your sessions, and I think its good to talk about if you are experiencing difficulty every week with a student and you're dreading your session because you know they're going to be there then its really good to go along and see what other people have got to say rather than not being able to say it to anyone, I think its good because Kate might go 'well I've had Graeme in my sessions and I've done this'.

Share experiences.

Yeah.

And also to let you know you're not on your own because he wasn't just a smartarse in Jan's session he was like that in everyone's so at least you know you're not the only one who is having to put up with that behaviour.

Sometimes with difficult behaviour you feel like that it's just you, and him or her and you know, so it does help.

It's good to know you're not the only person dealing with that.

It's not personal.

- *So kind of emotional support aswell.*

Yeah.

I think the smaller groups aswell, smaller groups I think was better, I think the tangents would be worse in bigger group, if it was the team.

Coming back to recording it aswell, if you had a smaller group and record it would be better than if you had a massive group, there's too many voices, if you had a smaller group and record what you said, you can see what we've talked about.

Plus some people don't feel confident speaking in a big group.

- *I think that was one of the things that came up in the other group aswell that, for most of them they felt like they did have the confidence in the smaller group to be able to, and they felt safe enough to say something without being challenged or other people would say something that would put them down, I don't know whether or not people felt like that in this group, or if they had any issues about speaking up or talking about issues or putting forward any suggestions, do you all feel as if in smaller groups, or you were in the sort of environment where you were able to do that.*

[Murmurs of agreement.]

- *OK excellent, anything you found unhelpful?*

At this time of day you find that people……

Can I ask you a question? I don't go and haven't been to College GFE and I'm curious as to your experience with students at Colleges, you have that, that's the general consensus, so you could share that difference of behaviour that I haven't got an insight too.

I have to say at College the behaviour is totally different, obviously different background.

Can I give you an example, Louise last week at two different times I had her, wonderful, her attitude highlight of the session, she was actually busy and another student wasn't and then at the end of the week what a contrast, so what happened to Louise, because it wasn't me I was doing the same thing, what she came out with it was to do with JFE, she's allowed to do

what she likes, there's twenty odd in the class and the tutor leaves the room, she was telling me in a round about fashion that I was a hindrance to her [?]

Because she's allowed to get on with what she's into.

The music was loud in the classroom, she wanted to put the music as loud in my room and I had two students that you're trying to communicate with, she didn't like that and she had a bad behaviour at lunch time, she did that bit of vandalism, so was it a reaction to the fact that yes they've got a different life outside at GFE but they also have to understand this is another institution in a sense we run differently, so it must be harder for those students who are now actually going to GFE, and then same person, same people can be with them, who might have supported them at GFE but the rules are different.

It's because when they go to GFE they've got less restrictions than what they have here, especially with us with all the health and safety crap they feel as though they're restricted, I think that's what the main problem is.

She really kicked against that by lunch time on Thursday, and yet we were best friends on Monday, it's the same person, same global SFEC, yet two completely different circumstances that make her behave differently.

- *I think that's what people need though isn't it to talk about how certain sorts of situations, you can talk about what might actually be happening.*

But also just to find out what might have made her act like that because something might have happened at College and you're like I didn't know that happened.

- *OK so you said something about the time of day the meetings are held.*

I'm always really late, I really apologise for that, because of the handover and…

- *No that's fine.*

I couldn't think of another time of day we could do it to be honest.

- *Well this is it isn't it, you can think between four and five is probably the best time to catch people.*

I suppose if you get advance warning, you say I've got to be at this meeting, I have to drop this as its more important, I think it should be prioritised this kind of thing, it's just sometimes you've got lots of stuff to do.

What would be quite good is if we did something termly, sometimes after the holidays the students are coming back maybe a days or 2 days after us sometimes on those occasions you haven't got as much to do so it would be good to get together an hour one morning, not that I want to do it just before Christmas you know on them two days.

We said before about the behaviour profiles, I think it's the best idea really get all the information, get every member of staff because not many people seem to read, and you just know if someone turns up on the day, you've got to be aware of any behaviours, I don't think

you should go to class expect to give a lesson and you don't know what kind of people you going to be giving a lesson too.

Even when new staff used to start they used to be given the behaviour profiles, right have a look through that, they don't even get that and when you're reading them you don't even know who the students are.

I think something definitely you should be doing because I prefer personally to know.

You learn slowly.

- *Do you think anything hindered the process then? Someone mentioned in the other group that there were no follow up of any strategies that were discussed.*

I think the meetings you've had you can review them, again if you've written down what you're done you can review what you did the meeting before, and then continue with the next bit.

- *So a quick update.*

Or even an update not even in the meeting, like a memo or something, just an email everybody.

- *Do you think the meetings have helped developed working practice in any way?*

I don't think they're been enough meetings really.

Yeah maybe good to have had some more.

- *I think that was the main disadvantage, everything being put back and missing the meetings, I think that's to do with protecting the time isn't it, if the time was protected then we would have been able to get more in but for the moment you're not able to draw any sort of conclusions just how they helped you in any way.*

I enjoyed them, like being able to talk about stuff and if we made it a bit more of a frequent thing I think they would have been quite beneficial.

Obviously it's time consuming.

The more people are informed about behaviours and stuff the better they'll be able to do their job.

- *Do you think that if this was something across the College, if everyone got into small groups to meet either once a month or fortnightly or termly, do you think that would have been something that you guys would be able to do or find useful, if it was embedded in peoples practice, just to do that on a regular basis, to meet up and talk about stuff, do you think that people would welcome that.*

Within their own site or mixed sites?

- *Within their own site.*

They might not welcome it but depending…

People who don't have a lot of time, doing lots of work, mainly the tutors really, so you got to find people who have a little spare time and then if the tutors have got issues give it to the people attending the meeting and they can bring it up and they can feedback to the tutors, but it might be helpful to get say a tutor and someone high up on the management chain in the meeting so its not just us saying right this is what we're doing then pass it on and nothing's happening.

I think that's an important point, there's actually a balance.

We discuss things all the time, tutors come and see us all the time, but when it comes to feedback sometimes it doesn't happen or it doesn't seem like it happens, what they do doesn't get fed back down, as much as it probably should.

Sometimes you don't even write things down, because you don't feel like anything is going to be done.

You can say to people higher up in the chain "You were there so are these behaviours getting addressed?"

- *So you saying that the sharing of information should be across all different types of staff, the whole staff team and not just the LSAs working together and not just tutors working together, if you're going to have meetings it should be a mixture of everyone.*

It would really good because I think Joan you were saying people wouldn't welcome having that type of meeting, I people would if we could be flexible about it and decide when it was going to happen, because it happens when you're got to get together in your curriculum group and we do training and that's really good because one allocated person write up the minutes and the email it to everybody and that would be so easy to do if each group had a different group of students to talk about and just email it and have a look.

- *So there's something there about deciding on who you were going to talk about before.*

Yeah I think that would be useful sticking to a set group of students.

If you tell everyone when the meeting is taking place, this is what we're going to be doing, have you got any issues of any students, then that might be better instead of choosing two or three students, it could be students who haven't been doing anything, you need someone to say right such and such has been doing this behaviour in my class is there any way you can bring this up in the meeting and discuss this, because if you think about it LSAs, me for example doesn't have as much experience as someone high up on the management chain or shouldn't have as much experience so they'll have better ideas of how to deal with certain behaviours.

Yeah they might have better ideas but on a day to day basis they don't, they spend a minimal amount of time with the students, I think its beneficial to them because I don't think they even realise how difficult some of the students are.

They might only come in when its observation but they don't spend any time during breaks and lunch times, like they used too, I've only been here three, coming round fourth year now but they used to be in TH and they were even joining them at lunch time at TH where now have very little time and its only when we've flagged up numerous occasions with one student that they actually get involved.

The management should observe the students not the teaching then you get a much better picture because your teaching may be really good but you get a really difficult, your teaching suffers because, so you get someone watching the students every now and again and obviously watching the teacher as well, in my eyes sometimes you think well I bet you think you, oh I've got these students in my class.

I had an observation this morning and I had students who I'd never had before.

Sometimes I think they don't do that and they should, you could be trying really hard to get them to do that and do all the things right, but sometimes it does get out of control you can't do it, its because you haven't been observed for ages and they think this tutors not doing a very good job.

- *What if you go into each other's sessions and observe.*

That happens in GFE I don't see why it doesn't happen here, peer observation, now that should be encouraged I think, I know that Linsey is thinking of doing it but I still think that it should be across the board, that happens in any education authority now that you do peer observation.

But at the end of the day you don't get observed how good you are at your job or not by your peers you get observed by people higher.

Here yeah, but where you do peer observation, what you're doing is actually sharing good practice.

- *I think just like you say it's just another way of sharing good practice.*

It not about marking you down.

- *Obviously they're got a checklist that they need to tick off, when Ofsted or somebody come in so that's what they are doing but I don't think in terms of developing your own practice, peer observation will be, so for example of you did have a really difficult session and you couldn't actually teach a session, whatever session you were doing then at least you would get feedback from whoever was observing you, saying well there wasn't really anything much more that you could do because this student was lobbing a chair across the room or whatever so I think sometimes it would be nice to have that feedback.*

I think it's just unrealistic sometimes when it's just the management coming in, well quite cold actually.

It's just a snapshot though.

Students alter their behaviour when there's management there.

You don't get a full picture, you might have just a crap day that day.

And then if you get a crap mark it does affect you.

I'll save it until tomorrow I'm alright, I've got feedback tomorrow.

They stay the whole session.

They do. Ivan's come from primary School and he says 'how long do they stay' I'm saying the whole session and he's 'what?', he says the practice in state school is that they come in to check a particular area and once they're seen that they'll go, but every observation I've had since I've started PGC and that was in placement as well it was four hours, five hours one whole day, its horrible.

We once had one come in for an hour didn't we?

No I normally the last one I had Patrick came in for nearly a full first session and then came back the last half hour or something, or twenty minutes.

But then you get really cross because when they've gone for that last few minutes you do really well.

Sessions are in sync and say you do three sessions a week and you cover the same topic, and Monday's can be like absolute pile of crap but then Tuesday's might be like absolutely fabulous and you'll be like how?

- *Do they observe your teaching or observe your teaching with certain behaviours?*

No it's just like your teaching, your teaching and learning.

- *Thank you very much for coming along and for the feedback. If there's anything you want to discuss in more detail, you know where I am.*

Appendix 10: Transcript Of The Evaluation Meeting For Professional Development Group 2

- I know it's been a long time since we actually last had the meetings, before the holidays, so I know I'm asking a lot to think back to those sessions and what you thought the process was like and what you thought was useful but we'll see what comes out of it. So the first thing I'd like you to think about is the format of the meetings and whether or not you can remember the framework that we used.

Vaguely.

- I don't know whether or not it would be useful to recap it. So the process, taken from Farouk and it was a four step process. First stage was description and clarification so we had someone presenting their concern and they were given the opportunity to talk freely about the situation about what their concerns are and the only questions that were asked was to clarify the situation. The next stage was reflection and it was just to gather more information, elaborate, and asking constructive questions so people could reflect on their practice. Then it was the theory generating stage what people thought actually might be happening in the concern that was described and also whether or not, how people would feel and when they came across their issues so reflect on emotion involvement and feelings and things like that and then the last one was strategy generating stage so really it was just brainstorming ideas solutions those sort of things. So what are people's thoughts on that format, do you think that format was actually used?

Somewhat, it was unclear on how much of the process was debriefing and how much was sort of actually constructive talking about things, we spent a lot of time saying the same things and we went over the same sort of problems and sort of generating solutions at random rather than following one solution to through to its end point.

It was more focused around sort of the middle stages rather than talking about strategies. There were a few times when we got to some really effective strategies though.

- Right OK so when you said that most of it was focused on the middle stages do you feel like that was something that needed to move on a bit more, whether or not you needed to be a bit more structured.

Well I think because a lot of the times we were sort of like following that structure and one of us, well we were all like doing it was like oh well that's like him so we sort of never moved on.

We jumped around the point I think…and I think because we have some students who have similar problems it can also be helpful because you can say well that worked with such and such so it might work with such and such but when you've got people displaying similar behaviours in the middle stage it would have been useful to stick on one person probably rather than jump to another person, which I think happened quite often which was probably our fault as much as anyone

- Right OK so there was a lot of discussions around issues and similar issues that you were seeing in several different students so it might have been perhaps more useful to be a bit more structured or the structure was there but to be followed a bit more clearly.

I think so I think maybe to have some sort of visual recognition as you're going along maybe do it with a flip chart or a board or something like that which keeps people on track a bit easier, helps you see where you've been and also keeps you focused at the issue at hand.

Yeah.

- I can't remember if it was this group or the other group I said that I would, it would have been quite, the structure itself although there were certain stages to it, it was going to be quite fluent and you might find ourselves moving backwards and forwards between them but from what you're suggesting is that we didn't quite move forward enough?

Yeah I think by the time it came round to generating solutions, I think people had already sickened themselves with the problem and almost didn't want to…

But also by the time we had got to solutions we had spent nearly three quarters of the hour, hadn't we, sort of talking about the problems and I don't think we'd left ourselves enough time there. I mean on a few occasions we did we were really successful with getting strategies weren't we on some occasions.

- Right so the amount of time spent on discussing issues did you think was too much or…?

I'm trying to remember, I trying to think of specific instances.

- I know you said you spent nearly three quarters of the time…

We all need to sort of know in depth what the issue was before we can try and work out.

I think with some of the more complex issues it would have been useful to say OK we going to talk about that and maybe not, I don't know if that's helpful but just focus on maybe one or two issues rather than going or even just one issue because some of them are complex enough and some of the solutions are complex enough.

Yeah maybe at the start we probably should decide what we were going to talk about and just stick to it.

- So it seems to me from what you're saying is that the structure was there but perhaps it didn't move forward quickly enough.

I think it sometimes we got really bogged down sort of with the negative thing. It was always nice to leave on a high because you left on this sort solution generation and saying well yeah we'll all go and do that, we'll go and try that, there was one, there was one session in particular where we had come up with things we hadn't really thought of and you get so focused on certain problems but I think sometimes we'd sickened ourselves on the negative and if it had just been half and half, outlined the problems on one side and the solutions on the other then we'd feel as positive as we have been.

- Yeah OK so I suppose it's really the job of the facilitator to see when things get bogged down perhaps to try and move things on in a productive way.

There's also the debriefing aspect of it, its part of the process, its quite a healthy aspect that I don't think anyone should feel bad about having to get something off their chest, you know

through GFE imagine you're working with someone one to one for quite a long time, you feel like you're on your own and it's nice to kind of feedback.

Yeah it is nice to know that everybody else is also experiencing the same issues.

So you wouldn't want to take that away completely but if we could just get more, move onto solutions quicker, possibly.

- I mean this is always going to be a practical issue in terms of time but do you feel as if the hour was too short of time if we had a complex issue to discuss.

Yeah I think if there was a couple of burning issues we would struggle to do it in that amount of time. If there were really complex issues you know things that have been, you know behaviours that have been a fixture for maybe over a year in some students, some students two years you know you would probably need more than one strategy to get out of that, you would need to go and unpick it go right back to the beginning and that obviously takes an awful lot of time, even you know if you come out with one solution, you try it and it doesn't work it would be nice, you know like with the solution generation to have a bank of things, say we'll try that first and if that doesn't work we've now discovered we've got that, we've got that, we've got that, and it's a bit more sort of belt and braces, I think a lot of the time at staff meetings on a Thursday we come out with, well we'll try that and then it goes away and it doesn't get dealt with you know it doesn't work and nobody really addresses it, where with the solution generation if we had time we could go through, OK we could try that one first and then work through them.

- I think we already started to look at what we found useful about the meetings, we talked about people needed to get something off their chest and things like that, do you think there is anything else about the meetings that you found particularly useful, I mean we're going to talk about what we found not useful but we'll look at if anyone found anything particularly useful about the sessions?

I think just making time for something like that, you know its all very well doing it as a standing issue on a staff meeting but something we don't do enough of is having behaviour meetings or something like these meetings and following that through you know, and I suppose this would take the form of a behaviour meeting, you're meeting to discuss behaviour issues, that's something that started at the beginning of the year and beginning of last year and we did a few with Diane what not but issues didn't really get followed through. You find that people were having problems with the same types of things but not having a space and a time to say right we'll get a few people in a room and actually see if we can do something constructive about it rather than just moaning and shooting in the dark with solutions.

Because different people will experience that person differently or somebody would know what works with someone else knows which was quite nice about these meetings but you know.…

- I mean you mentioned the follow through, did you feel that there was scope in the meetings to actually look at you know if we discussed an issue, I know there wasn't enough time, but if an issue was discussed to actually try and follow that through next time we met. I don't know whether or not if we actually did that in the meetings, I can't remember.

Not in a structured kind of way.

We only recapped.

Yeah we looked over what you'd written previously we went through sort of brief notes but like you say some issues [?] we've maybe got a number of strategies, to go try a number of angles to come from and to realise that an issue would be useful I think.

Definitely.

- So that's something that perhaps you know if this was to, to be changed on? Then the opportunity to follow through or recap to look at [? bad sound quality]

It's about looking at the challenging behaviour and how it changes all the time for various different factors; to go from sixteen to seventeen might be enough, problems at home. Issues can be reframed and reflected upon [bad sound quality]. People do things for different reasons all the time, you know it might be for attention one day, it might be for escape another day and to come back round to certain issues and look at the reasons for it is really useful.

- Right Ok anything else about the meetings that you feel helped or were useful?

I thought that when you finished on solutions that was a positive thing because you go away with a bit of a, that is good, something to do, something to try, you got something out of it, it felt productive.

You also found that people agreed with your methods aswell, sometimes you feel that people don't agree with what you do.

You get an indication as to what you're doing is right.

They can't understand why you're doing this method and they say perhaps you're giving into students, not really you're just building bridges and things.

- So a sharing of knowledge or a sharing of practice…

Both, sharing with everybody and getting everyone's feedback and everyone's different.

- So you felt that was quite useful, people understanding why you did things the way you did?

You're able to explain why you did this, why the student is allowed to do this.

- The rationale isn't it.

The rationale for why you've done it, yeah the rationale.

It's just a time to explain yourself really, to talk to others. cos often times in the staffroom you can't be bothered cos you're having your lunch.

It's always the same with snapshots though, people come in and watch you, they don't know anything else they just get this little snapshot.

- I suppose aswell if they don't understand why you're doing things they can, like you say make a snapshot, make a snap judgement and they're got fixed methods in their minds of how things should be taught or how things should be. Right I'm going to end that bit of the meeting. Are there any aspects of the meetings that you found unhelpful, that didn't work or could be improved?

I think like we said before getting bogged down on the details, I know details are important, but flitting from similar subject to similar in the middle, although they seemed similar but probably are quite different.

Yeah reading behind it they're probably completely different and probably a lot of time we did go off on tangents. I mean it was good to debrief about different people but it just wasn't very productive.

- So the flitting from one student from another, I know when we first came together I explained that we weren't necessarily going to talk about individual students, maybe sort of group them together into similar sort of behaviours but I think Brian was saying they're all individual aren't they, so do you think that the grouping of students together into similar behaviours that wasn't as helpful, it needs to be…

Yeah, I think it's good to take it on a case by case basis, sometimes you will, behaviours happen for different reasons so you're going to have different solutions in most cases. As much as they seem on the face of it seem to be similar, they're probably not really, they behaviour might be similar but the person, the reasons won't be.

- Yeah the reason behind it and the explanation, OK right is there anything that hindered the process do you think. I know we said bogged down and you know the details and that might have helped hindered the process, but is there anything else?

The only way to collect the information was to just have the meetings, which we sat round a table, people had their views, where there were the methods for research, we had the observations, we've got the questionnaire now, we had individual interviews for people so they don't have the influences, they might give you more information when there's no one else there because they don't feel threatened or embarrassed, intimidated.

It was good that we were all together because we all sort of paired off with each other [?]

I noticed, I hope it's relevant, I was speaking to somebody from the other group and they said they felt quite a lot of intimidation from other people, I didn't feel that within our group, but I know somebody from the other group felt quite uncomfortable about having their working practices questioned kind of thing, well that works for me so I don't know why it doesn't work for you kind of thing, and whether that was true but that was certainly was their perception of it but I felt our group was sort of a bit more, more open…

- So I mean maybe I might get a chance to discuss that with the other group because I mean that's really interesting, I do get what they are saying it can be quite intimidating sometimes if you're talking about your practices and then somebody else comes in and perhaps say something completely different about how they work with an individual student. I mean did anyone feel that in this kind of forum they were able too, I mean I can't because not

everyone is here, but did you guys feel like you could talk openly and honestly and not feel intimidated.

No I started in the first meeting and something was said, I'll not mention too much about it, and I felt reluctant to ever say again, and very very reluctant to draw on past experiences, remind, mind, I was bringing past experiences to help people not to boast about where I've been what I've done so I felt it was just, sarcastic remark, and left it at that so I was very reluctant to say anything else with the group, nobody here I'm talking about, but I did felt like it was very hostile the comment that was made. I'll tell you later but not now.

- No that's fine, if you want to talk about it in a bit more detail because that's quite interesting aswell, the whole point of these groups was to try and foster some sort of security and safe environment because if you don't feel that you are going to be reluctant so…

I'll not mention names but we're from the same background we're both primary school teachers so singing from the same song sheet and had all the training but it was all different levels and we had different perceptions of what should be happening but still I felt that threat.

- OK that's very useful thank you and I'm sorry you felt that way. Do you feel if people did feel uncomfortable did you feel it was made clear that you could come to me to discuss how you were feeling I mean I don't know whether or not that was made clear, if you had any concerns?

No it's all here, it's your email, your telephone, your address.

It was pretty clear on everything.

Yeah no problems there.

I never felt any pressure to stay in, I feel I could have withdrawn at any point and I would have felt comfortable coming to you with my reasons if I had to do that.

- OK I think that's something that I might need to discuss or find out with the other group because it's been mentioned and I think it's really good that people are discussing it outside of, the meetings outside of the group with other people who are sharing a similar sort of experience whether or not they are finding it useful so I'll see whether or not that comes up. Right then so do you think that the meetings have helped you develop your practice or changed the way you think about issues.

I think that if we could have had more of them more regularly then I think that they would have eventually. I think that it takes time for a process to bed in, and if we had done that more often. I'm sure that it's unpopular with some people but behaviour got to what we do, you can't teach people until you can get them engaged and disengagement is probably the biggest thing that you fight against all the time and so doing it more constructively, you need to back it up though aswell with meetings, you need somebody who, what Diane was doing, following people around, not following people around but going into sessions, have sessions that has a sort of observer and to say well OK maybe that thing is maybe not working, somebody who is always present at the meetings who would follow it up afterwards and bring stuff back to the meetings and have behaviour more sort of a live issue rather than just the things that just, "OK right there's something in the community folder can everybody read it", and I don't know if anybody does or not but if you got somebody going around then behaviour   is
more of a live issue rather than a paper issue it means we definitely have to back that up and

we can include different people at different times so you've not pulled everybody for a meeting every week.

Yeah I think the size of our group was quite good, I think if you had more people it would be too much but if you chopped and changed and had quite small groups it would be quite good.

- Right OK, so there's something there about perhaps talking about issues that are real and not down on a piece of paper that is a bit abstract. You also mentioned that you don't necessarily have to stick with the same group each time, is that right?

Yeah, people might not want to come to the meetings if there's too many.

It's about talking about what works or doesn't work, about what you did aswell. You can talk about what went wrong and think about things like if you were talking too much or you didn't explain something and it helps you develop your own practice aswell.

- Right OK so there needs to be from what you're saying there needs to be a bit more reflection.

There needs to be more follow up.

- More follow up.

So we sort of made the strategies but it would be good to come together and sort of see what worked for certain people.

- So did you kind of feel they were left in limbo if you discussed a strategy and what solution that was it, it was just that you are go and do it and that was it, there is no, has it helped has it not.

Yeah I'd say someone to go away, not just write something up but actually present it as an idea rather than as a bit or paper on the community folder, somebody to go away and to communicate to people this is an idea this is what we're trying to achieve, which I know that the behavioural documents have got that "why we think this person's behaving this way" and what not but to actually follow it through to go into the sessions, is it working, if its not working what's or best guess why its not working and meet more regularly.

- I mean I think the, one of the major problems we have is trying to get people together, there wasn't enough time for people to get an idea of how useful the sessions were or whether or not its something that would help people's development or practice as it were but certainly from what you're saying if you had more of them it might have been something that would have become embedded, I suppose its fostering a culture people actually talking to one another isn't it.

Yeah, and I'm sure the more you do something the more you streamline the process, work out what works and what doesn't work, what might work for one group but might not work for another but that's, if you streamline the process and then add on business models, do we have a pre-meeting process where you just quickly write something down on a bit of paper and so the person chairing the meeting of what's going to be coming up, it may be more useful for the chair.

- Yeah and it suppose it would help with the focus the session, like you were saying before if people knew what was going to be talked about in the session they would just focus on it and not get too far off track. I'm really bad at going off in tangents aren't I?

I think we're all guilty.

No I think especially at that time of day aswell four o'clock, your head's full of stuff.

Yeah especially when you've had a bad day.

- So do you think the time of day I mean the time of day is always going to be an issue when you are talking about meetings and things like that, but it didn't help with the time of day, the amount…

Thinking when else would you be able to do it, if you did it in the morning I'd doubt you'd be much better, if you did it at lunchtime I'd doubt you'd be much better, you kind of, I don't think there is an ideal time of day for that.

- I think the theory behind it seems quite good but in practice. OK so I think the last thing that I wanted to have a look at was whether or not you thought the sessions could be changed or improved and I think that we've already touched on that before, if there were more sessions, something that I was thinking about right at the beginning of last year was if these sort of meetings, people's impression about the meetings, whether people found them useful, would people go off on their own and set up their own little groups of practice as it were, do you think that something like that would be quite useful if people were to arrange themselves into little groups, that the staff tend to arrange themselves into small groups of five or six.

Well we were having behavioural meetings at one point the beginning of last year I'm sure it was and the premise behind it was great but they sort of quite quickly fell down, it was a similar process to what we went through with, the process wasn't quite as directed but it was a similar thing were we would maybe try and stick to one problem, it wasn't staff generated though generally, well it wasn't, the attendees, I went to a couple and it was just if you wanted to talk about such and such today you weren't really asked. So in that sense I think that's quite good in you left it open, in sort of burning issues naturally come to the top.

- Right so the people that you talked about in those behaviour meetings tend to be chosen by a manager or like a senior member of staff.

Yeah the ones I went to was either Bobby or Lynne, Diane and sometimes Jessica and a tutor or LSA. Diane was sort of behaviour co-ordinator at the time, and but it could have been useful to include more people, maybe have either Jessica, Bobby or Lynne…

I went to one and I had only been there about two weeks and I hadn't a clue, I don't think, it was only my first week and I just left.

 Yeah it's a bit random, if we had, if we were in charge of our own groups.

But it does work because in the week after the summer holiday we were all put in a small little like LSA working groups and there was no senior people there, it was just us in a room to talk about stuff and it was quite productive, all of us were just equal, and all sort of come together to sort of discuss.

- I think that's something that I was thinking about if people actually got themselves together into little groups maybe not just all LSAs but a mixture of people, you know LSAs, tutors, senior teaching staff or whatever and for someone to be the facilitator to move things along so that people didn't get too bogged down in all the negative stuff, I mean do you think that sort of thing, if that was to happen, again its to do with culturing and for it to be embedded, would you think that's the sort of thing people would go for or response quite well, respond quite positively too?

I think you would get a mixture of response, I think that you would get some people who would see the value in it, and some people would see it as a hindrance, because of the stuff they have to do between four and five, which time pressure, with any job you get that but I don't know what do you think, would you get enough people interested?

[?] take time.

I think it's a worry about it being between four and five.

Well, incidently, we're having skills to life meetings on the morning and the first ones were the twenty third of November at NR at half eight in the morning, so it's got to be arranged that we have time away from college here and to travel all the way over there so if you want to change the time for these meetings, we'll try and get time out of sessions, first thing in the morning is great for me.

It would need to be valued enough by the managers to do that.

Nine till ten, fine.

- You know I suppose it all comes down to the culture of the college.

Yeah I think that in tutorial it can be useful in some sessions but it could be a big waste of time for some people depending on how engaged the students are but if you're taking a range of people from all over, you needn't take everybody out of one tutorial, I think between nine and ten if you did it you'd probably get more people involved and more people motivated to do it.

- I just had a thought you were saying you did have at the beginning in September, you were put in a small group of just LSAs talking about issues and things like that, do you think it would be more helpful if people were put into, working with other tutors or working purely with, just LSAs or a group of tutors rather than mixing the staff team up.

No I think it would be good to mix it.

Do you not feel that you might feel intimidated with tutors being there? When you're just an LSA or regard yourself a LSA, I know everybody's equal and everybody's got the same right to input and everything else, but some people might feel, like we were talking about earlier about, well tutors, I'm a tutor and you're only an LSA which is totally wrong but it does happen.

- I suppose there's always going to be isn't there, some people rightly or wrongly might think that, I'm just an LSA if you're a LSA, I'm a tutor my thought or opinions are better.

I suppose we experience the students in a different way depending on…

Best if you get a GFE, it would be useful to get, LSAs, tutors, managers because you get a more fuller picture of the person, you get a fuller picture of the behaviour, in a way some of the guys don't respond well to women, some of the guys might respond better only to tutors or LSAs because the students whom [?] the tutors are, I don't know, so I suppose if you get a range of different posts then you're going to get a more full picture of the person and the behaviour, but whether its helpful for people taking part in the meetings or helpful for the students is one thing, helpful for the meetings is another.

- I think the main focus in my mind of the meetings yes it was to support people's practice in the college, in the working practice but it was more for the staff, so that they felt more confident in working with challenging behaviours, I suppose if they felt more confident then obviously it is going to benefit the students, but I don't know whether or not people felt that it did, if its something they had to do, want to come to, didn't see the point of, didn't have an impact at all.

I think you have to want to do it, you have to believe in spending time on these things, which I suppose if you're having more meetings you eventually pick up those people who hopefully are interested, that if, the better you get at the meetings the better the process gets the more results you see, the more involved people feel in the process, drip drip drip, hopefully you pick up more people over time and not alienate too many.

- So I think one of the things from what you're saying is that the amount of time or the length of time that the meetings were running, like we said we've only had three with this group, if it was if we had our own way it would have been a lot more throughout the year, at least six months I think, but that obviously didn't happen so we might have seen a bit more progress or usefulness to the meetings maybe, right.

Put a time limit on the meetings, I don't know if it would work but we used to have quarter to nine to nine o'clock we used to have staff meetings every morning and at nine o'clock it stopped, it just stopped which meant you had to be relevant to what you were saying, there was items to be brought up from yesterday and for today and it had to be sorted, there was none of this oh where are we going on holiday, it was like on task, focused, this is what we're doing and it was sort of sharpened you into thinking because you had to stay with it and you had to do it within that time.

- Yeah streamlining and focusing and just getting everybody to say on top on task.

Which would work on the morning because you got your framework, this is what you want to discuss, what do you think, what do you think and right…and it might not work but it gets people thinking.

And if you did it regular enough you could even do it in half an hour meeting, from half nine until ten or something like that and say right we're discussing one issue here and if you're doing it every week then maybe you could get through that, enough issues and half an hour would really focus people if you got one issue.

- Very interesting. I suppose if you streamline it too much then people don't get the opportunity to get things off their chest, may be not spending forty five minutes [?] too productive.

Well do it next time for the, if we have regular meetings.

- I think that's something that I'm going to talk to the college about. Thank you very much for coming along. If you do want to discuss anything in more detail you know how to contact me.

Appendix 11: Diagramming Showing The Proposed Intr-Relationships Of Categories During The Selective Coding Process