

Collectively Coming to Know:  
An Ethnographic Study of Teacher Learning in Toledo, Belize

by

Janice Achtem  
B.Ed., University of Victoria, 1985  
M.Ed., University of Victoria, 1999

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of

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## DOCTORAL ABSTRACT PAGE

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### ABSTRACT

In this ethnographic case study I examine the meanings and manifestations of teacher knowledge by inquiring into the perceptions of learning for a group of primary school teachers in Toledo, Belize, Central America. As an outsider, I construct an insider's view of teachers' knowledge by representing what these teachers know about teaching and how they have come to know what they know. The lived experiences of the teachers are illuminated as I discuss opportunities and challenges for educators in this region of the world. The insider-outsider relationship is examined as I reflect on my role as a volunteer with a non-profit organization, as well as a researcher and a Canadian secondary school teacher.

The following questions structure the study: (1) *How does the development of teachers' knowledge occur in rural communities of the majority world country of Belize?* (2) *What kind of impact has the Teachers for a Better Belize (TFABB) "Literacy Coaches Program" had on the development of teachers' knowledge in Toledo, Belize?* Results of the study are represented in three distinct ways. The creative ethnography highlights the lived reality of local teachers as I interpreted the typical journey they take in learning to teach. The realist tale, including several detailed participant quotes, illustrates a more explicit map of teacher learning as it connects with current research and literature. The confessional tale represents my highly personal reflections with regard to the research as well as my own learning.

Toledo teachers identify many factors affecting their formal learning including economic constraints, geographic isolation and limited resources. Local teachers do, however, recognize and engage in the less formal learning opportunities available to them. They collaborate with peers, seek out mentors, engage in teacher workshops, and reflect on their own practice. An oppressive cloud, however, looms over the educational landscape in Toledo, as teachers describe tacit yet lingering effects of colonialism present in their educational culture. In this study I conclude that to realize improved opportunities for both teachers and students in Toledo, there must be genuine understanding and respect between all educational sectors. By raising the profile of the underrepresented primary teacher in Toledo, this study aims to promote meaningful dialogue between all those involved to nurture the professional knowledge development of teachers.

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## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to all primary school teachers in Toledo, Belize. Your continued efforts to deliver quality and relevant education to the students in your care are truly inspiring. The work is also dedicated to the most beautiful being in my world. It's time to play now.

## **Chapter 1 - Introduction**

This ethnographic case study examines the culture of education in Toledo, Belize, Central America. The lived experiences of primary school teachers in the district of Toledo are brought to the fore as I investigate the opportunities and challenges that exist for them as professionals in their region of the world. The study illustrates my attempt at obtaining an insider's view of the generation and acquisition of teachers' knowledge by discovering what it is that teachers know and how they have come to know what they know. Themes emerging from the research indicate that economy, religion, ethnicity, history, geography and politics all play significant roles in developing the educational landscape in the district, including teacher learning. The insider-outsider relationship is highlighted using a specific model of collaboration between a minority world non-profit organization and an educational community in a post-colonial, and recently independent, Belize.

### **My Journey to this Study**

This research is very much the result of the culmination of my life experiences. For most of my life I walked as part of mainstream society, living and working within my comfort zone in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. I was a product of the local school system and quickly entered the teaching profession. In time, I was inspired to step out of my safe box and hopped on a plane to Africa; an experience that changed my life forever. The way I perceived myself and others in the world became significantly altered. I gradually lost sight of the sides of my box.

Experiencing life in the majority world, also referred to as the developing world, is more than difficult to describe, as every possible emotion invades your consciousness. The dirt and pollution make you sick. The violence and corruption make you angry and frightened. Wide-eyed children using milk-cartons for shoes make you cry. Games of marbles with toothless old men make you laugh. The kindness and generosity of people makes your heart ache. Most importantly, taking it all in at once makes you wonder. This is where I saw myself; simply wondering. Why is the disparity in the world so massive and how can we shrink it? I believe the answer lies in *connections* and bringing people together.

Making connections is now my mantra and in essence, the purpose of my life; indeed it is how I choose to live my life. Such connections have the potential to create powerful, positive change. My research is very much related to my overall desire to contribute positively to the world in which I live. It is not my right or my choice, but rather my *responsibility*. I strongly believe that the single best way to accomplish this is through the power of education.

Since that day I flew to Africa, I have traveled to 18 different majority world countries, gaining first hand experience with education systems in several of them including Zambia, Latvia, Cuba and Nicaragua. Recently and most significantly, I have worked as a volunteer with a non-profit organization called Teachers for a Better Belize (TFABB). Since 1996, this organization has sent teachers from Canada and the United States to Belize to help the local teachers with professional development. My assignment has taken me to the isolated villages of the south, where corn is ground into tortillas,

rushing rivers wash clothes and thatched roofs provide shelter. See Figure 1 for Belize's location in the world.

I have discovered birthplace in the world has little, if any, to do with level of intelligence. There are people in every country in the world who are able to think for themselves and make important decisions. I suggest however, the degree of opportunity, education and experience varies from country to country. Specifically, teachers in Belize simply have not been exposed to the many resources, techniques and strategies available to most educators in Canada. My work with TFABB, years of experience as a teacher and extensive travel, came together, providing the time and place where I was able to put my wondering into action.



Figure 1 Map of Central America showing Belize's location in the world (Lonely Planet Maps, 2009)

## Statement of Research Problem

Education is a human right. Despite government pledges to achieve universal access to primary education by the year 2000, millions of children worldwide are still without access to relevant quality education (COL, 2006). Most of these children live in majority world countries. Living in a majority world country represents the way in which the majority of the world's citizens live. Although the abolishment of school fees in many such countries has led to significantly increased global primary school attendance, many children are taught by teachers who are far from ready for the task. These teachers often begin challenging careers in remote isolated communities, armed with little if any preparation, training or supplies. Combined with a rapidly increasing world population, one can easily conclude there aren't nearly enough teaching colleges to prepare the number of teachers needed in our world today (Sawyer, 1997; Kanu, 1996; Hickling-Hudson, 2004). In places where such educational institutions do exist, prospective teachers are often unable to attend due to limited economic means or difficulty in relocating for such education.

In the majority world country of Belize, approximately half of all primary school teachers are formally prepared for the job (Pineda, 2006; TFABB, 2009). Although history reveals that Belize has never faced a critical teacher shortage, there has always been a dire shortage of *qualified* teachers; teachers with the necessary academic background coupled with specific teacher education. The district of Toledo, in particular, is Belize's poorest and most isolated region, with the lowest number of certified teachers in the nation. Although published statistics vary, between 25% and 35% of their primary school teachers are fully certified, with almost 40% not receiving any schooling or

education beyond high school (Pineda, 2006). Historically, teachers at the primary level have been hired with as little as a primary school education. The challenges associated with teacher education in Toledo are exacerbated by geographical isolation as well as the tacit, yet powerful presence of religion in many educational decisions, including the management of teachers.

Several researchers recognize the link between quality teachers and educational reform. Globe and Porter (1977) argue that the competence of the teachers is an essential element in the operation of the school and in the accomplishment of necessary reforms. Darling-Hammond (2006) states “Education is increasingly important to the success of both individuals and nations, and growing evidence demonstrates that – among all educational resources – teachers’ abilities are especially crucial contributors to students’ learning” (p. 300). Kachelhofer (1995) contends that well-qualified teachers are the only people that can really make a difference to the quality of a country’s work force. Finally, Zumwalt (1986) states “There can be no excellence in education without first-rate teachers. One can change the curriculum, buy more materials, refurbish the physical environment, lengthen the school day, but without good teachers change will not produce the desired effect” (p. vii).

Research shows that teachers learn to teach in a variety of ways, and that formal teacher education is but one means by which teachers develop knowledge used in their profession (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Studies reveal that teachers around the globe gain knowledge both inside and outside the classroom, formally and informally, individually and as part of groups (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Shulman & Shulman, 2004; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Of great significance is the fact that

teacher learning is situated, context based and cannot be separated from the actual teacher (Connelly, Clandinin & He, 1997). It is intimately connected to teachers' personal beliefs, backgrounds, social influences, philosophies, values and worldviews (Wilson & Berne 1999; Munby, Russell & Martin, 2001).

## **Research Questions and Purpose of Study**

It could be argued that the goal of all social science research is to improve the overall human condition. This study attempts to do so in two steps – steps taken deep into a myriad of overlapping influences relating to the culture and history of a people.

In order to improve the human condition in relation to teaching in Belize, one must first have knowledge of the current condition. To that end, I actively explored the development of teachers' knowledge in the district by listening to people describing their lived realities. Prior knowledge and lived experiences of teachers were not overlooked, rather were discussed and valued as key components comprising teacher knowledge. This part of my inquiry was guided by the following research question:

(1) *How does the development of teachers' knowledge occur in rural communities of the majority world country of Belize?*

The next step in this study was to design and implement an intervention in an attempt to improve the condition identified. The collaboration of an outside organization, Teachers for a Better Belize (TFABB), with educators in Toledo, was identified as such an intervention. In particular, their initiative of the "Literacy Coaches Program" was analyzed in this study. This model, jointly designed and facilitated by local teachers and North American volunteers, has been a significant grass roots endeavour working to increase teacher knowledge and competency in the region. Educational leaders in many

parts of the world, including Belize, have been forced to design such alternative means in preparing teachers and assisting them to grow as professionals throughout their careers (Connections, 2001; Kachelhoffer, 1995). It is hoped that this intervention and ultimately, this investigation, supports change in terms of the development of teachers' knowledge, increasing the quality, access and relevance of education delivered to primary school students in Toledo. This part of my inquiry was guided by the following research question:

(2) *What kind of impact has the "Literacy Coaches Program" had on the development of teachers' knowledge in Toledo, Belize?*

Moving forward and refining my inquiry, I was guided by three important points: passion, academia and practicality.

(a) It was necessary for me to conduct research in an area I was passionate about, as I would be immersed in the topic for quite some time. My passion for this project began, and has grown, as a result of my volunteer work in Belize. I remained focused on the fact that the research involved people; many of whom I knew well. Even though only a small percentage was directly involved in the study, I knew the research had the potential to reach them all at some level. My passion for this work also stemmed partly from my travel experiences through many majority world countries, including Belize.

(b) It was also necessary for me to study an area where there was an existing gap in current literature. Although there is a substantial amount of literature related to the education system in Belize, only a few of the studies focus on teacher education. The ones that do exist emphasize formal training of teachers and/or teacher colleges rather than situated learning in the context of teaching or learning by sharing knowledge at

professional workshops. There also seems to be limited literature available to the global population on this type of learning in Belize. Much of what does exist is difficult to find as it is tucked away in the archives department in the University of Belize in Belmopan or in the Journal of Belizean Studies which is not an online journal and can only be found at St. John's Junior College in Belize City.

(c) Of critical importance in this study was its potential for practical application. It is my hope that it will serve a purpose for the educational community in Toledo, and perhaps all of Belize. If those who educate and administer teachers reflect on the study, they may gain a deeper understanding of how teachers perceive their own learning. I acknowledge the fact that it is, in effect, *my* perception of *their* perception, but as I have outlined in the research design section of this dissertation, I have included many detailed quotes from teachers in Toledo, adding both legitimacy and depth to support my perceptions. It is not my intent to downplay the importance of formal teacher education in Belize. In fact, I recognize the many reforms it has gone through over the years, transforming itself to better serve the needs of a newly independent and growing nation. My concern, and the focus of this study, however, is that teacher learning in Belize, as well as other parts of the world, comprises much more than knowledge acquired as part of teacher education programs. Many teachers in Toledo will never be able to experience the formal schooling necessary to become certified. For some, teacher training may have occurred years ago. A few may teach by day, and attend college in the evening. In all cases, teachers should be afforded the opportunity to learn and continue to learn, as teachers.

Although Belize has only enjoyed independence for 28 years, Belizeans find themselves in a fairly stable democracy. This democracy provides each person in the system with a sense of ownership of his or her community with the power to speak, the power to vote, the power to be heard and the power to *matter*. This research raises the profile of primary school teachers in the district by listening to their views and offering a medium for their insights to be heard. Toledo primary school teachers are not merely one group of 278, but rather 278 groups of one - each and every one with a distinct voice and set of values. This research acknowledges these people and bears witness to the challenges they face in their struggle to become more knowledgeable educators.

Research findings may help inform individuals outside the immediate setting and could be shared with those making decisions on behalf of Toledo's students and teachers. This may include district leaders, who often make only one visit per year to some village schools, or Ministry officials working in the capital city, who have likely never been to a remote village school in Toledo to see the scene that is played out day after day.

It is hoped that all educators in Toledo, including the administrative teams, understand that the delivery of relevant quality education and teacher learning are intimately linked. They are forever connected and directly proportional. This study does not provide solutions, but instead highlights the lived realities of primary school teachers, in the hopes of promoting thoughtful and reflective dialogue leading to action, resulting in the improvement of the human condition for teachers and their students.

### ***Theoretical Framework***

The evolving theoretical framework guiding this study followed an interpretive or constructivist approach. This paradigm is based on the contention that knowledge is

actively constructed, historically and culturally grounded and laden with moral and political values (Howe, 2001). Because I chose to understand a phenomenon, rather than to formulate a logical or scientific explanation, I employed a qualitative approach in this study, where value was assigned to context (Kramp, 2004). Qualitative researchers understand that behaviours, events and actions are all meaningful as embedded in this context. This approach differs drastically from the traditional positivist approach, which contends that there is a frozen or rather fixed body of truths (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Sparkes, 2002).

My ontological position is framed by the belief that truth is relative to an individual and is unique to that individual. In this study, the varying social realities were made up of some of the following ontological perspectives: people, interpretations, perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, views, experiences, cultures and social practices. I also needed to consider how knowledge and meaning were created from these truths - an epistemology. This was a critical step, as questions directly related to epistemology have intimately framed this research, such as: *What is knowledge? How is knowledge acquired? What do people know? How do people know what they know? Why do people know what they know?* In this study, constructivism shaped the learning of both the local teachers and me. Richardson and Placier (2001) refer to constructivism as a way of learning that suggests that individuals create their own new understandings based on the interaction of what they already know and believe and the ideas with which they come into contact.

## **Background of the Study**

### ***Teachers for a Better Belize (TFABB)***

For many years, minority world countries have recognized disparities that exist in the world and have put forth noteworthy efforts to assist countries such as Belize, to improve many aspects of their overall development, including systems of education. For the past twelve years, TFABB, a small international non-governmental organization based out of St. Louis, Missouri, has been working closely with teachers and administrators in Toledo, Belize. Although this partnership of volunteer educators from North America and Belize works to improve the overall primary education system, it focuses predominantly on the development of teacher knowledge throughout the district. Specifically, TFABB works collaboratively with local educators in the region to design, implement and evaluate an annual summer professional development workshop - now the single largest and most comprehensive professional development event of the year in Toledo (TFABB, 2009). Funding for this project comes primarily from private donations from American and Canadian citizens. The Ministry of Education in Belize helps cover costs related to meals and transportation for participants.

The district of Toledo entered into this partnership with TFABB in 1996. The group was formed at the suggestion of a local principal in the Toledo district named Carmelo Juarez. He met two sisters from the United States of America, who were traveling in Belize at the time; one a teacher, the other an employee of the United Nations (UN). After much discussion, they agreed to establish the organization and conduct annual teacher education workshops in the village of Big Falls. The project focuses on Toledo because it is Belize's poorest region, with the fewest number of trained teachers

and where 50% of children leave the education system before they finish primary school (SPEAR, 1991). It was agreed that experienced teachers from North America would conduct the teacher training workshops each summer in hopes that the local teachers participating would become more knowledgeable and competent educators. During the first summer workshop in 1996 there were approximately 20 local teachers participating and three teacher trainers from North America. As the event grew in popularity and importance, Toledo's Regional Education Council and local Ministry of Education became involved in the coordination of the workshop (TFABB, 2009). In 2000, Belize's Permanent Secretary of Education visited the workshop and proclaimed it a model for the other regions of Belize. In 2008, almost 300 teachers attended the annual workshop.

In its infancy, TFABB sent volunteer teachers to Belize and made comprehensive “top-down” presentations to the local educators. In this setting, it was clear that the North American volunteers were the ones with the power and were indeed the leaders in the process. This colonial method, promoting elitism and a lack of local realities (Crossley & Tikly, 2004; Hickling-Hudson, 2004), provided a band-aid solution at best. Although the participants claimed to benefit from the weeklong workshops, their input was rarely asked for, making them only passively involved in the whole process. TFABB was a resource provider who had yet to understand that knowledge was not something merely to be transferred, but rather co-created and fluid. As time went on, the workshop evolved, increasingly meeting specific needs of the teachers.

The new millennium marked a positive shift for this project, leading to the local teachers taking steps in owning the process. Realizing that an important goal of this process was to empower the teachers to become leaders in their own communities, the

workshop became much more collaborative. Members of the NGO discussed ideas with the local educators and deduced that making the workshop more relevant for the participants was essential. Although the teachers in Belize had not been exposed to the resources, education or experiences, similar to that of the NGO volunteers, classroom discussions revealed an abundance of knowledge related to culture and customs that was important and needed to be shared. A new design approach was developed that focused on increasing leadership and participation at the local level.

Beginning in 2000, TFABB volunteers paired up with local Belizean master teachers to design and present the workshop material. Since this time, the teachers have had direct impact on the content, delivery and evaluation of their workshops; the workshops that ultimately benefit them, their students and their communities. With the local teachers taking a more significant leadership role, a more authentic partnership was realized as well as *perceived* by the remaining workshop participants. Local teachers watched as individuals from their own communities and villages were leading workshop sessions. The in-depth knowledge of the local education system and student population that Belizean leaders brought to the workshop was a necessary ingredient for an effective partnership.

My experience with TFABB provided an ideal springboard for me to jump into further research. Although local educators had become more active participants in their own learning, it would have been naïve of me to think that all problems were solved. There were still significant political, financial, cultural and geographical challenges that faced local educators and teacher learning in Toledo. I learned that it was neither my right nor my place to attempt to fix such problems. No outside organization or independent

researcher can change the educational system in Toledo. Any change must come from within the community, starting with the teachers in Toledo. I could, however, continue to listen to and work with the teachers, offering a sounding board as they increased their skills, competence and confidence. With the intent on continuing to help the teachers help themselves, I conducted a pilot study in the Fall of 2005.

### ***Pilot Study***

The pilot study was directly related to, and came about as a result of, the work that TFABB had been doing in Toledo since 1996. After discussing the summer workshop in 2004 and reviewing the participant evaluation forms of the same year, it became evident that local teachers and administrators were growing more competent and confident. Some expressed a desire to take a stronger leadership role in the organizing and implementing of the workshops. In an attempt to promote more meaningful and lasting participation for locals in the process, I conducted an investigation into the area.

In March of 2005, I spent two weeks in Toledo laying the groundwork for the work I was proposing to do in the fall months. I explained that I planned to return in September and would very much like to interview some teachers and work with a group of local people to help design the next summer workshop. The District Education Officer, Mr. Oscar Requena, was my contact person and was the one who called all subsequent meetings on the topic. He was clearly the leader in this process and I, the follower. Despite the fact that I was an external force initiating the process, the involvement of the people living the reality was valued, appreciated and included.

Moving to Toledo for three months for this endeavour proved very useful. I interviewed 12 people for this study including teachers as well as educational officials

and teacher educators. As a guide or facilitator in this process, I began by interviewing local teachers to gain a deeper understanding of their perception of the relevance of the summer workshops – which ideas and strategies had worked for them, which had not, and why. Although participants admitted to enjoying past workshops, a common concern seemed to be the lack of carry-over into the classroom. This lack of connection from theory to practice is a common theme across the globe in the teaching world (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 2006) and was evident with the teachers in Toledo. When it came to implementing the ideas, many of them had either forgotten the lesson, did not have the materials to conduct the lesson or were not motivated enough to complete the lesson. Results of the interviews showed that teachers wanted some continuity from summer to summer and that additional leadership at the local level might be the answer. Even though this was what I had suspected, it was reassuring to have the problem identified first hand by the local teachers.

A short time later, I was invited to present my findings to the Regional Education Council, which is the governing body that makes all major decisions concerning the education system in Toledo. Once this group had accepted in principle, any new idea or change, a small group could be formed to work further on the idea. Mr. Requena was impressed with my detailed work and recommended that a sub-committee be set to further investigate the issue. Displaying local leadership, he designed the team with me as the only non-Belizean in the group. Locals selected the team of key educational stakeholders and also set the schedule and agendas for subsequent meetings. The sub-committee consisted of: Mr. Oscar Requena, Mr. Estevan Assi (curriculum coordinator), Mr. Telesforo Paquiul (manager of Catholic schools), Mrs. Celia Mahung (teacher

educator at the University of Belize, Punta Gorda campus) and Mrs. Jane Locario (retired principal and member of the district assessment team) and me. The comments and suggestions shared by local educators were valued, discussed and then acted upon. This step in the research process was participatory in nature as it explicitly required client participation (Brown & Tandon, 1983), which is illustrated by the locals' involvement in this step of the process. This committee was able to identify a theme and set up a framework for the next summer workshop. The first week would be devoted to curriculum leadership and focus on working with 10-12 individuals whom the committee would select as possible school or cluster leaders. These leaders would then partner with North American members of TFABB to carry out the presentations the following week, for the regular group of participants – almost 300 in number. It was hoped that this cadre of effective teachers and leaders, subsequently known as literacy coaches, would become agents of change in their district.

The subcommittee designed a pamphlet inviting any fully certified and motivated educators to take part in the project as a literacy coach (see Appendix A). After reviewing all the applicants, selections were made based on experience, geographical location as well as attitude. “It is very important that these people are motivated and will continue their commitment for the full two years” (E. Assi, personal communication, November 30, 2005). Sixteen literacy coaches were selected to act as resource people for a larger group of teachers who taught similar levels in primary schools.

For clarification purposes, the pilot study was completed as part of required doctoral coursework at the University of Victoria. The unpublished manuscript is referred

to throughout this dissertation as “Achtem, 2006”. Pseudonyms were used for all participants.

### ***Literacy Coaching Program***

After a review of annual TFABB participant evaluations, my pilot study in the fall of 2005 and several meetings with teachers and administrators in the district, the “Literacy Coaching Program” was realized. This approach was chosen in an attempt to increase leadership among local teachers, to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of the larger annual workshop and to expand and deepen the impact of current teacher education efforts in the district (TFABB, 2009). It was agreed that coaching would be a non-evaluative collegial working relationship to support the growth and confidence of the classroom teacher in order to promote and enhance student learning and performance.

The literacy coaches model functioned as a teacher mentoring system where experienced local primary school teachers received specific training in leadership as well as literacy content and methodology, which was then shared at interactive sessions throughout the year with groups of local primary school teachers. Although the initial leadership education sessions were intense and facilitated by outside sources (North American volunteers working with TFABB), they were collaborative and dynamic in nature. I know this to be true as I was present for the first week-long session that took place in August of 2006. Workshop sessions were guided by the following topics:

- (1) Engaging Strategies - graphic organizers, brainstorming, celebrations and humour, movement, working together, visuals
- 2) Effective Presentations - audience considerations, timing, voice and body language, feedback, activities and engagement

- 3) Communication Skills - paraphrasing, clarifying, summarizing
- 4) Goal Setting - student learning to take place
- 5) Strategy Design - activities and materials needed to support learning
- 6) Different "Hats" Coaches Wear - colleague, principal, friend

Specifically, the group of 16 coaches was charged with the task of facilitating three one-day in-services each year for following two years. Dates for the first year were set for October 26, 2006, February 22, 2007 and May 24, 2007. Coaches also played integral roles in the design, implementation and evaluation of the week-long annual summer workshop. Each presentation team consisted of two local coaches and one North American volunteer who collaborated throughout the year via email and phone calls. The effects of this program are discussed in depth in Chapter 4.

Although the model used was not a replica of any one particular coaching model, the concept was similar to *participatory training* or *community of learners* common in other parts of the majority world, as it was organically designed and focused on teachers as collaborators, mentors and researchers. Such professional learning communities provide opportunities to examine and reflect on teaching and share experiences associated with efforts to develop new practices. They can be powerful learning tools as they engage people in collective work on authentic problems that emerge out of their own issues and efforts. They allow teachers to reach beyond the dynamics of their own schools and classrooms to come into contact with other people and other possibilities (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995).

Shaeffer (1990) claims that participatory training, although not a clearly defined approach, has a number of general characteristics including: the teacher plays an active

role in creating his or her knowledge, training is self-directed and based on self-reflection, and specific classroom experiences, rather than generalizations, are analyzed. Various participatory methods related to teacher learning throughout the majority world are discussed in the next chapter of this dissertation.

## **Historical Context of Belize**

### *Pre-Colonial Times*

The rich and varied history of Belize has significantly impacted the current education system, and as such, warrants exploration. The region of the world now known as Belize was first inhabited by Mayan Indians from approximately 2000 BC to 900 AD (Pastor, 1995). It was an advanced civilization that made significant advances in astronomy and mathematics and developed a positional system of numeration and an elaborate calendar (Pastor, 1995). They wrote in books made from bark and invented a system of hieroglyphic writing, some of which have survived to this day that have helped archaeologists to discover more about the Mayan culture. It is commonly thought that the Mayans must have attained a high level of education to be able to do all this.

During this time, it is estimated that close to 400,000 people lived in the area known as Belize, more than its current population. When Europeans arrived, the indigenous people were forced to relocate to remote inland parts of the colony and eventually decreased in great numbers. Although it is not known why the population decreased in such a way, some historians believe that the Mayan Indians died off because of disease or conflict.

A small group of British adventurers, called Baymen, set up logging camps at the mouth of the Belize River in about 1750. These men were drawn to the logwood, a valuable tree whose sapwood was widely used in Europe to dye clothing. With the additional logging of mahogany a short time later, the work became too much for them and they imported slaves to assist them. Most of the slaves came indirectly from Jamaica. Before arriving in Jamaica, they had made the long journey from different parts of Africa by boat to the New World (Twigg, 2006).

Although there were some Anglican missionaries doing basic tutoring at this time, it was only the children of the slave owners who received this type of education and some were even sent to Great Britain for their education. Eventually the settlement grew and logging became a stable and successful industry. By the first decade of the nineteenth century there was a greater sense of security among the settlers and a readiness to establish a stronger social foundation in their community (Bennett, 1991).

### ***Colonial Education in British Honduras***

Although the colony of British Honduras was not formed until 1862, a strong colonial education system prevailed in the region. The curriculum was basic and focused on literacy with dominance in religious training for the masses (Bennett, 2000). Laws enacted in the 1850's established the policy and procedures for schools to operate within a church-state partnership (Bennett, 2000). This traditional system of church-state administration and control of schools in Belize has prevailed with the strong support of successive governments (Bennett, 2000).

In 1923 a group of clergymen met to discuss colonial education. They formed the Committee for Education in African Colonies and made recommendations to the Colonial

Office (Lewis, 2000). One goal of the colonial education system was to maintain a society divided by occupation, race and class. Another was to make sure that the people understood that the whites, the merchants and the landowners were in control (Lewis, 2000). Students learned about Britain and Europe and not about Belize and the Caribbean. The primary teaching method involved rote learning rather than critical thinking (Lewis, 2000). For much of Belize's colonial history the government spent very little on education, leaving it up to the churches to provide funding. It was only after the mid 1950's, with the development of the nationalist movement and local control, that a substantial percentage of the national budget began to be spent on education. In 1931, 8% of the budget was spent on education; in 1983 it was 21%; and in 1990 it was 24% (SPEAR, 1991).

Over time, there became a clear connection between economic development and educational modernization in Belize. For example, in 1940 when a road opened joining the southern district capital of Punta Gorda with the small village of San Antonio, much changed. The road not only permitted the Mayan Indians to interact with the outside world with greater frequency and ease, but also served as an artery through which elements and influences from the larger society could be introduced in the Indian community. Priests arrived, a police station was established and a Mayan Cooperative developed. While all these developments were taking place, there was a substantial rise in the levels of education attained by the villagers. This information was revealed by a village-wide survey conducted during 1968 (Gregory, 1983). Before 1950, none of the villagers had received any schooling beyond the primary years. The survey showed however, that eleven village youths (eight boys and three girls) attended some form of

schooling following primary school (Gregory, 1983). With growing emphasis on economic advancement came an increasingly prevalent conviction that progress toward such ends could be furthered by the attainment of higher education. Many villagers held the view that it was important their children receive an education. In response to the 1968 survey questionnaire taken in San Antonio, 135 household heads (88%) said they would like to see their sons or grandsons have more education than they themselves had received (Gregory, 1983).

### ***The Easter Report***

In 1935, the Director of Education in Jamaica, B. H. Easter, was invited to British Honduras to make a comprehensive inquiry into the education system. Although the report is over 70 years old, its significance cannot be overlooked as it was the first study ever done on the education system in Belize, which has in turn, laid the foundation for the country's present education system (Lewis, 2000). The report was used to reorganize the education system and marked a turning point for educational development. Among the 16 suggestions and recommendations of the report were: the denominational system should remain, curriculum and exam requirement should be revised, a teacher training center should be established and agents of the "Jeanes Teachers" (see next section) type should be appointed to supervise the schools. A full list of Easter's suggestions and recommendations can be found in Appendix B.

### ***Teacher Education***

Prior to the first school act in 1850, teachers were mostly volunteers affiliated with a religious denomination and sometimes paid a small stipend for their work

(Bennett, 1991). The overall consensus at this time however, was that there was a need for the colony's teachers to be trained (Lewis, 2000). In 1855, as part of the amendment of the school act, the "head master and mistress" of schools were to be certified teachers from a school in Britain (Lewis, 2000). The requirement was abolished in 1893 however, as the government officials reported that they were being sent unqualified teachers (Lewis, 2000). Despite this fact, there was no effort made at the time to form any type of teacher training institute. In fact, it would more than a century before such a program would be developed. In the meantime, there were other ways in which teachers gained knowledge useful for their work as teachers in the country.

#### Apprentice model

A common practice that developed at about this time was the apprentice model of teacher training. Teachers would identify outstanding Standard VI students and place them in schools to work along side teachers and principals who would serve as their mentors. This model consisted of two evaluations: the first pupil-teacher exam and the second pupil-teacher exam. The student would then earn either a First or Second Class certification respectively and become a trained teacher. These new teachers could easily gain employment at any primary school (Pineda, 2006). This practice continued for quite some time. A participant in this study, in fact, remembers being prepared for the profession in this way.

#### The Jeanes teacher

One of Easter's many recommendations was to engage in a type of teacher helping system that already existed in the southern areas of the United States of America,

called the “Jeanes Teacher”. I include this section as I see astounding parallels between it and the Literacy Coaches Program operating in Toledo. It turns out that TFABB was, in a sense, merely repeating what had been implemented some 70 years earlier. The goals of each program are incredibly similar; to develop the education and proficiency of the local teachers.

In 1935 The Carnegie Corporation of New York made a grant of \$13,500 US to the Government of British Honduras to be used for the Jeanes Teachers over the period of three years. J.C. Dixon, supervisor of Negro Education for the state of Georgia, visited British Honduras the following year to make recommendations regarding the Jeanes Teacher Project. He was critical of the education system at the time specifically related to the number of non-Belizeans teaching and the dual control of the church and state. He complained that the Catholic schools were run by Americans and the Anglicans by the British. He urged that the teachings staff consist of local teachers. As outlined by Pastor (1995), Dixon’s main recommendations were:

- (1) Three Jeanes supervisors should be selected based on the qualification of the job regardless of religious affiliation. One local and two foreign teachers (probably from Jamaica) could be employed. One of the supervisors may be a woman.
- (2) Jeanes supervisors should be directly responsible only to the Superintendent of Education. Placement and duties should be assigned by him, and these supervisors should work cooperatively with both church and state.
- (3) The duties of the Jeanes supervisor should be to improve classroom instruction and to up-grade the teaching personnel in the colony.

- (4)
  - a. A one or two teacher school should be selected in Belize City to be operated as a Demonstration School.
  - b. This school should be under the general supervision of the woman Jeanes supervisor for Pupil-Teacher practice teaching. This should be in addition to her field work.
  - c. The Demonstration School must be a Government School with its own principal and staff.
- (5) Government should begin to train local men and women so that they may teach their own children.

In 1937 the Jeanes Teacher system was introduced in British Honduras with three teachers, all trained in Jamaica, beginning the process (Pastor, 1995; Lewis, 2000). They were hired to help the teachers in the rural schools improve their methods and standards of teaching. Gradually the Jeanes supervisors' work included administrative work as well. In 1942 they were called Supervisors which led to the change of the name in 1951, to Education Officers. This term is still in use today, with one Education Officer assigned to each of the six districts in Belize. Although it was somewhat of a contradiction in that they did not actually hire local teachers as Dixon had suggested, it wasn't long before all Education Officers were local Belizean educators.

### Teacher Colleges

The first Teachers' Training College opened in Belize City in 1954 (Bennett, 1991; SPEAR, 1991). By 1964 there were three teacher training institutions: The Intermediate Training Center, The Government St. George's Training College and the Roman Catholic St. John's Teachers' College. In 1965 they were combined as the Belize

Teachers' College and given the responsibility of teacher education for the entire country. During this time, it was very difficult for teachers living in Toledo to make the long trip to Belize City and take up residency for such formal education. From 1965 to 1980 the teacher education program increased from one year to three years. During this period other options for teacher education became available through the opening of the University of the West Indies in Jamaica (Lewis, 2000). In 2000 the Belize Teacher College became part of the University of Belize. Shortly after this amalgamation, the University campus in Punta Gorda included formal education for primary teachers, making it much easier for teachers to attend.

## **Relevant Concepts and Terms**

### ***Toledo, Belize***

Despite its small size, Belize is a very complex and diverse country. Its tropical climate includes heat, humidity and plenty of rain, resulting in lowland flooding as well as devastating hurricanes. It is home to people of many different cultures, societies and language backgrounds. It is the only country in the world that is considered part of both Central America and the Caribbean. This dual belonging poses some challenges, not the least of which is language as it is the only English speaking country on the mainland. Belize's population density is one of the lowest in the world, yet its population growth rate is one of the highest in the western hemisphere (World Fact Book, 2009). This fact alone will have severe implications with regard to the education system in the country.

Toledo is the most southern and isolated of the six identified regions in Belize, often called the "Forgotten District" because of its geographical and political distance

from the capital (Crooks, 1997) (see Figure 2). It is home to only 10% of the country's 300,000 inhabitants (World Fact Book, 2009). Its capital city is Punta Gorda Town, a small port nestled in the Bay of Honduras on the Caribbean Sea. Less than 20% of Toledo's population lives in Punta Gorda though, as the district's population is scattered throughout the region with its most populous culture, the Mayan Indians (constituting over half of Toledo's population), living in more remote inland villages (Statistical Institute of Belize, 2008).

After the Garifuna formed the settlement of Punta Gorda in 1802, other ethnic groups including Creole, East Indians and Chinese migrated into the area creating a very multicultural capital. Over time ethnic groups have intermarried increasing the percentage of people of mixed ethnicity. The 1994 Census showed 16% of those living in Punta Gorda as being of mixed ethnicity (Woodbury Haug, 1998). Toledo is a unique part of the world where people of many different ethnic groups co-exist in a peaceful manner, each able to lead a rhythm of life working to preserve their own cultural heritage.

Despite its natural beauty, the district of Toledo is the least developed of all the districts and has been plagued by chronic poverty for a variety of reasons including lack of education and infrastructure. The majority of its population still relies on kerosene and lives in thatched-roofed huts, while most other Belizeans use electricity and live in concrete homes (TAFBB, 2009). It is an area of dense jungle and heavy rains, with widespread Malaria. Many dirt roads, and even bridges, have been known to wash out in the rainy season, further isolating the people of the district.



Figure 2 Map of Belize showing the Toledo District in the south (Wikipedia, 2009)

In the district of Toledo there are more than six distinct languages spoken. Two-thirds of its inhabitants speak either Q'eqchi' Maya or Mopan Maya as their first

language. The remaining people are first language speakers of Creole, Spanish or Garifuna. Figure 3 shows the various first languages spoken by the people in Toledo, when compared to the rest of the country.

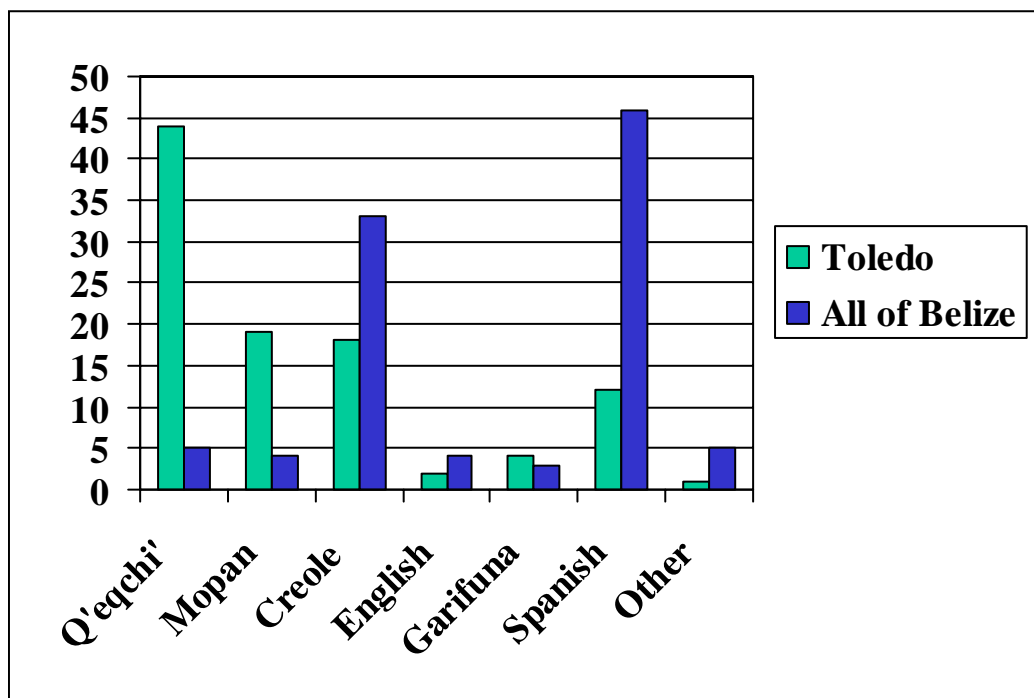


Figure 3 First languages spoken in Toledo/All of Belize, by percentages of people (Newport, 2004)

Belize fits the mold of a majority world country as school is taught in the language of the colonizers, a language that is foreign to many indigenous children and compromises their ability to learn (Crooks, 1997). All textbooks and examinations contain only Standard English. Because most of Toledo's rural citizens speak either Q'eqchi Mayan or Mopan Mayan, they learn English only if they attend school. Lack of bilingual education equates to Mayan children who are academically disadvantaged from their first day of kindergarten, while lack of fluent English limits later educational and economic activities (Bradley & Robateau, 2004; TFABB, 2009).

Citizens of all ethnic groups are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of English proficiency. This issue is by no means isolated to the district of Toledo, or even the country of Belize, as about 22% of the world's population is identified as speakers of a local language which is no longer the language of social and economic mobility in the country in which they live (Vawda & Patrinos, 1999).

### ***Primary School Governance***

There has always been a strong connection between the church and the state, forming a dual control system of school governance. Three types of schools operate in Belize: government schools; public schools (religious); and private schools. Toledo fits the national trend - of its 48 primary schools, 10 are government, 35 religious and 4 private.

The Ministry of Education is charged with setting the national curriculum, examinations, and formulating policy for all schools. The government pays 100% of primary school teachers' salaries (except private schools) which constitute over 90% of the national education budget (Penados, 2000). They provide 100% of all other funding in government schools (resources and construction) and 70% of such costs for religious schools (Iyo, 2000). More recently, the government funding has reached close to 90% for such projects in religious schools in the Toledo District (C. Lopez, personal communication, April 8, 2009). The Ministry of Education's investment in the process is intended to ensure availability, access and affordability to all children between the ages of 5 and 14 for whom primary education is mandatory. Private schools receive no government funding and charge annual student tuition fees to cover all aspects of school operation.

In government schools, teachers are managed by the District Education Officer. In religious schools, the church is in charge of the general administration of the schools including hiring and firing teachers. They determine where teachers will teach, what level they will teach and which teachers are promoted to various leadership roles, including principals. These leaders also determine which schools will receive construction updates, additions, resources and supplies.

**Table 1 Primary school governance in Toledo, Belize**  
(numbers are from the time period 2005-2009)

	Number in Toledo	Teacher salaries	Resources and materials	Curriculum is set by	Teacher placement and promotion	School upgrades and/or construction
Catholic	30	Ministry of Education	70% government 30% parish	Ministry of Education	parish	parish
Government	10	Ministry of Education	100% government	Ministry of Education	government	government
Methodist	3	Ministry of Education	70% government 30% parish	Ministry of Education	parish	parish
7 <sup>th</sup> Day Adventist	1	Ministry of Education	70% government 30% parish	Ministry of Education	parish	parish
Anglican	1	Ministry of Education	70% government 30% parish	Ministry of Education	parish	parish
Private	4	Student tuition	private funds	Ministry of Education	private	private

### *Organizational Structure of Schools*

In Belize there are six administrative districts: Belize, Cayo, Corozal, Orange Walk, Stann Creek and Toledo. Each district has its own board of education governing the schools. An Education Officer is in place in each district to oversee all schools in his or her district. There are about 270 primary schools in the country, 30 secondary schools and five tertiary institutions (Iyo, 2000). In the southern and most isolated district of Toledo, 90% of all primary schools are located in what could be considered very rural areas. Many teachers travel great distances daily to the schools in which they teach. At times, teachers are not able to locate transportation to school, resulting in a class of students without a teacher. Figure 4 shows a school in Dolores, Toledo, a remote inland village approximately five kilometers from the Guatemalan border.



Figure 4 School in the rural village of Dolores, Toledo



As Belize was the only country in Central America to be colonized by the British, the structure of schools is very similar to that of British schools. Language used to describe the classifications of levels reflects this influence. Primary school, which is mandatory, begins at age five and continues until age 14. The first two years of primary school are referred to as Infant I and Infant II. Standard I to Standard VI follow these years. Class size average in primary schools is 26:1 (Iyo, 2000), but there are plenty of primary classrooms in urban settings where there are over 40 students (Cathers, 1998). Approximately 75% of primary school aged children are actually attending primary schools (Iyo, 2000). From there, students move to high school where the years are referred to as First to Fourth Form. Class size average in secondary schools is 16:1 (Iyo, 2000). Attendance is even bleaker there with only 42% of high school aged children in attendance. Only 10% of high school aged children complete the entire high school program (Iyo, 2000). Students can then move to a Junior College, known as Sixth Form, or University. Students do not have to attend a Junior College before University.

Upon completing primary school, children in Belize must sit a national exam referred to as the Belize National Selection Exam (BNSE) or the Primary School Exam (PSE). Test content covers Reading, Writing, Mathematics, Science and more recently, Social Studies. Students' final marks on this exam are calculated as percentiles. Because of the limited space available in the country's high schools, only a certain number of students are able to attend secondary schooling. Those moving to high school face yet another challenge. Although there is no formal tuition charged, the average student in Belize will need approximately \$700US per year to attend high school (Crooks, 1997; J. Newport, personal communication, March 21, 2005). These fees cover uniforms,

computers, labs, administration, computer use, libraries as well as supplies (J. Newport, personal communication, March 21, 2005).

### ***Teacher Training/Teacher Education***

The terms teacher training and teacher education are used interchangeably in the literature and to some degree, in this dissertation as well. Although the two endeavours often overlap and are easily mistaken for one another, the distinction is a subtle but important one. Dewey (1916) relates education in a broad sense, to the social continuity of life; the act of maintaining by renewal. It “draws out” an individual and involves the development of knowledge using the mind. One could argue that training, on the other hand, involves the acquisition of specific knowledge and/or skills for immediate application, with little continuation or growth beyond that point. Teacher training involves a perceived expert working with a novice in some capacity; a transfer of knowledge from a tutor to a student. The training is top-down and prescriptive, implying that teachers are empty vessels and deficient in some particular knowledge and/or skills and that trainers understand the teaching process better (Shaeffer, 1990). Teacher education, on the other hand, involves preparing teachers for a professional role as an active and reflective practitioner. It is less form and more substance, placing faith in teachers’ judgments (Lanier, 1984, as cited in Shaeffer, 1990).

As it is possible each has its place in the development of teachers’ knowledge, I will respect the use of the terms as they appear in the literature. Most research from the majority world uses the term “training” whereas literature from the minority world tends to use both terms, sometimes in same article to mean the same thing. One may only speculate as to why this is so. Despite the use of both terms in the literature, I recognize

the power of words and contend that, more often than not, they reflect intent.

Connotations and values are inevitably attached to every word, which necessitates careful attention by the user, especially when working in a foreign culture. As this study is about the generation of knowledge and the empowerment of teachers, the term education was preferred over training, as the connotation of “education” is more positive humanistic and on-going. As a researcher, it was not my intent to “train” anyone in this process. Instead, I attempted to create the time and space for learning to occur, leading to improved education for all those involved.

### ***Majority World/Minority World***

There have been various terms used over the years, both by academics as well as the general population, when referring to different parts of the world and their people. Such terms have included: underdeveloped and developed; developing and developed; first world, second world and third world; north and south; the global south; and the west. The relatively new terms, majority world and minority world, can now be found in newsmagazines, some online academic journals as well as books. Although these terms are meant to be value neutral and ignore economic indicators, there still has to be some way to classify the groups and identify which country belongs where.

It is generally assumed that the countries ordinarily referred to as developing countries constitute the majority world and the developed countries belong to the minority world. The term majority world is based on the notion that the globally poor countries, as a group, host the majority of the global population (Talbot & Verrinder, 2005). In other words, and as an example, more people world wide live as Belizeans than as Canadians. It is a concept that is somewhat ironic as it turns our traditional

understandings about various regions of the world, on its head. A small group of countries, whose decisions affect the majority of the world's peoples, represent a tiny fraction of humankind and is, in fact, the minority world.

In the early 1990s, Bangladeshi photojournalist and scholar Shahidul Alam began advocating for a new expression "majority world" to represent what had formerly been known as the "third world". Alam is the founder and chairman of *Majority World*, a global community interest initiative formed to provide a platform for indigenous photographers, photographic agencies and image collections from the majority world to gain access to global image markets (UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 2006). Alam claims that most terms used to describe the poorer countries in the world have strong negative connotations that reinforce the stereotypes about poor communities and represent them as icons of poverty. The term "majority world", however, seeks to define the communities in terms of what they have rather than what they lack.

In this dissertation I have chosen to use the terms majority and minority world for two reasons. Firstly, they are more progressive and have become widely accepted. Secondly, my role as an academic involves challenging my mind as well as the minds of others. For the minority to take the lead in changing the majority of anything is an interesting, yet not uncommon paradox, which will be discussed in chapter four of this dissertation. In this paper, I refer to Belize as belonging to the majority world and Canada as part of the minority world. Although it is not quite as simple as that, it is important to make the distinction for the purpose of the dissertation. As a majority world country, Belize has a history of playing host to a variety of organizations from the minority world involved in development assistance.

## Chapter 2 – Review of the Literature

Education is a vital resource for any nation's development in the global world. The education of teachers is emerging as an essential element to the improvement of a nation's education system. As previously highlighted, several researchers recognize this link between quality teachers and educational reform (Kachelhofer, 1995; Globe & Porter, 1977; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Zumwalt, 1986). Central to the inquiry examined in this dissertation is the identification of what it is that teachers know and the process by which they have come to know what they know. The role of formal educational institutions, the act of teaching itself and professional collaboration with peers in relation to teacher learning are explored. As this investigation focuses on teacher learning in the majority world country of Belize, other specific aspects are considered including post-colonial education systems as well as the role of outside development organizations as described in Chapter 1.

Although much research has attempted to discover what and how teachers learn, things are still not clear. Wilson and Berne (1999) suggest this is because teacher learning is scattered at best and serendipitous in nature. Much of what and how teachers know is tacit and difficult to articulate – it just seems to “happen”. Teachers themselves often have difficulty explaining how they actually come to know. Research does reveal, however, that teachers acquire knowledge in a variety of ways (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Shulman & Shulman, 2004; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). It is necessary to examine what it is that constitutes knowledge, whose knowledge counts, as

well as how and where teachers actually gain or construct knowledge and engage in learning.

Although there are still unanswered questions relating to the acquisition and development of teachers' professional knowledge, the concept itself is becoming more familiar in academic circles. Fenstermacher (1994) suggests, however, that the critical objective of teacher knowledge research is not for researchers to know what and how teachers know, but for teachers to know what and how they know – for teachers to be knowers of the known. It is then possible for teachers to become more intimately linked with their own learning and recognize potential learning opportunities throughout the course of their teaching career.

### ***Teacher Knowledge***

Being a relatively new term, “teacher knowledge” is only beginning to be understood by the present generation of researchers in teaching and teacher education (Munby et al., 2001). It is also significant to note that the terms “teacher knowledge” and “knowledge for teaching” are related, but quite different matters. This terminology and more will be discussed throughout this chapter.

The term teacher knowledge comprises many types of knowledge, often overlapping, and developed in a variety of ways. Exactly what it is that teachers need to know continues to shift between advocates of content knowledge as well as pedagogical or methodological knowledge (Zeichner, 2006). Although several researchers have identified types of knowledge or a “knowledge base” for teachers, the categories outlined by Shulman have become widely accepted in academic circles (Munby et al., 2001). Shulman (1986) refers to teacher content knowledge related to content that “grows in the

minds of teachers” as falling in three main categories: subject matter content knowledge, curricular knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. In addition to Shulman’s categories of content knowledge, current research identifies two other important aspects surrounding teacher knowledge relating specifically to the individual teacher: personal knowledge and personal practical knowledge. Of critical importance however, is the fact that the various types of knowledge, as well as the way in which they are developed, cannot be separated from one another. Despite their close ties and connectedness I have attempted to outline the terms separately for clarification in this dissertation.

### ***Subject Matter Content Knowledge***

As the heading suggests, this type of knowledge covers the content area being taught. It refers to the type, scope and organization of the knowledge in the mind of the teacher. It may be related to content matter and/or organization of units and lessons for instruction. It involves going beyond knowledge of the facts or concepts of a domain. The teacher need not only understand *that* something is so, but must further understand *why* it is so (Shulman, 1986). In other words, teachers must not only be capable of defining for students the accepted truths in a domain, but also be able to explain why something is deemed warranted, why it is worth knowing and how it relates to other propositions, both within the discipline and without, both in theory and in practice (Shulman, 1986).

### ***Curricular Knowledge***

Curricular knowledge refers to the full range of programs designed for the teaching of a particular subject and or topic at any given level. It includes the variety of instructional material available in relation to those programs such as the knowledge of

alternative texts, software programs, visual material and the like – all helping the students to understand the concepts taught. Shulman (1986) also suggests that teachers should have an understanding of the curriculum in the other subject areas their students are simultaneously studying. Knowledge of content and materials of the preceding year as well as the following year, is also considered part of curricular knowledge.

### ***Pedagogical Content Knowledge***

Pedagogical content knowledge involves the understanding of subject matter and transforming it into classroom instruction. It is here that the relationship between *knowing* and *teaching* is formed and where research on each most closely coincides. It is a special type of content knowledge that involves making the content teachable. Such aspects may include: the most regularly taught topics in one's subject area, the most useful forms of representation of those ideas, the most powerful analogies, illustrations, examples, explanations and demonstrations (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Pedagogical content knowledge is about ways of representing and formulating the subject that makes it comprehensible to others. It also includes an understanding of what makes the learning of specific topics easy or difficult as well as the conceptions and preconceptions that students of different ages and backgrounds bring with them to the learning of those most frequently taught topics and lessons. Shulman (as cited by Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999) defines pedagogical content knowledge as:

that special amalgam of content and pedagogy that is uniquely the province of teachers, their own special form of professional understanding...it represents the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics,

problems or issues are organized, represented and adapted to the diverse interest and abilities of learners and presented for instruction (p. 8)

Griffin, Dodds and Rovegno (1996) refer to pedagogical content knowledge as a way to package everything up that teachers understand – about the learners, the content, the teaching strategies, the school, the students and the community- in order to help students learn.

### ***Personal Knowledge***

Personal knowledge refers to any knowledge that a teacher brings to his or her classroom as a result of personal experiences. It is what makes a teacher unique and encompasses such aspects as culture, family influence and world views. Personal knowledge gained through life experiences provides a rich component of teacher knowledge and ultimately teacher learning (Britzman, 1986). When connecting life experiences with teacher knowledge and learning, it is specifically helpful to look at the cumulative experience of school life – specifically looking at teachers when they were students themselves. This is a very telling aspect to examine, as beginning teachers commonly repeat what their own teachers have done.

Britzman (1986) contends that the teaching profession is one of the most socially familiar professions. By virtue of being a student, one has the supposed firsthand knowledge of the profession including such things as curriculum, school structure and teacher duties. As more people worldwide attend school than ever before, it could be argued that almost everyone has some kind of idea about what a teacher is or does. This knowledge about teaching is socially constructed knowledge in the mind of the general public, including of course, pre-service teachers. Years of compulsory schooling allow

students to expect teachers to maintain classroom control, enforce rules, and be experts in the curriculum. In effect, they need to be continually in control of the situation and have all answers readily available. Within the context of school structure, students construct images of the teacher's world. In an ethnographic study of junior high school students, Everhart (1983) describes how students understand the work of teachers:

From the student point of view, there was little else involved in what teachers did in the classroom other than represented in this simple "factory model" of learning: that is, the teacher's pouring in the facts and the students pouring them back in the form of papers and tests...The student picture of teachers provided little room for emotion, with the exception of that associated with student violation of school standards. The teacher's world, in the student's eyes, was straightforward and linear, hardly complex at all. (p. 74)

### ***Personal Practical Knowledge***

Personal practical knowledge refers to knowledge that one develops on the job as a result of the act of teaching – knowledge that is directly related to teacher experience. It is their "know how", as they create and use knowledge derived from action in the classroom (Munby et al., 2001). The work of Clandinin and Connelly has figured prominently in this area. They support a personal and experiential understanding of teaching and teacher learning that does not separate knowledge from the knower (Munby et al., 2001). They believe that teacher knowledge is derived from personal experience; the sum total of the teacher's experiences (Connelly et al., 1997). They call it personal practical knowledge and define it as:

Personal practical knowledge is in the teacher's past experience, in the teacher's present mind and body, and in the future plans and actions. Personal practical knowledge is in the teacher's practice. It is, for any one teacher, a particular way of reconstructing the past and the intentions of the future to deal with the exigencies of a present situation (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p.25).

## **Conceptions of Teacher Learning**

In this dissertation I have adopted the terms used by Cochrane-Smith and Lytle (1999) to outline the various conceptions of teacher learning in a variety of world settings. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) identify three main conceptions of teacher learning: knowledge *for* practice, knowledge *in* practice and knowledge *of* practice – which all lead to very different ideas about how to improve teacher education and professional development. It must also be acknowledged that teacher educators as well as both pre-service and in-service teachers may subscribe to different theories or conceptions of learning, based on their own beliefs, backgrounds, social influences, philosophies, values or worldviews. A study of two contrasting teachers by Carpenter, Franke and Levi (as cited in Wilson & Berne, 1999) illustrates this point nicely. Teacher A saw her professional knowledge as a fixed body of information that was packaged and delivered in courses and experiences outside the classroom. She felt learning occurred when she took more classes or reread articles from past classes. She considered it her professional responsibility, to take newly acquired knowledge and work it into her practice (Wilson & Berne, 1999). Teacher B on the other hand, saw her own learning in ways similar to her views of children's learning. She built her professional knowledge through experience and reflection – most of which took place inside her own classroom.

It could be argued that teacher A held the belief that professional learning occurred outside the classroom as knowledge *for* practice. Teacher B on the other hand, held the belief that professional learning occurred inside the classroom as knowledge *in* practice. The two teachers may in fact, have different views of knowledge and hold different epistemological stances. Specifically, Teacher A may subscribe to a traditional behavioural theory of learning. In this paradigm, learning to teach is conceived in terms of skills, tasks, routines and strategies that the teacher is able to perform in the classroom (Stuart & Tatto, 2000). Teacher B may subscribe to a more progressive approach known as constructivism. In this paradigm, the teachers may believe that in conjunction with formal subject content and pedagogical knowledge, they are able to use their own experiences to develop their own theory and practice as a teacher (Stuart & Tatto, 2000).

Things are not quite as simple as that though. Such varying conceptions of teacher learning are not mutually exclusive. Each potential learning opportunity for teachers does not fit neatly into one of the categories identified. Professional development sessions for example, could be based on the notion of providing knowledge *for* practice OR constructing knowledge *in* practice – depending on how the sessions were facilitated. In the same way, increasing numbers of teacher education programs, traditionally considered providers of knowledge *for* practice, are providing opportunities for student teachers to spend more time in the school setting, reflecting on their practice teaching – enabling them to gain knowledge *in* practice. It is useful then, to consider the relationship that exists between the different conceptions and how they may overlap in the course of a teacher's professional development. Munby et al. (2001) contend that the area of teachers' knowledge is indeed complex and interwoven; that different views have

developed about what counts as knowledge, including how knowledge is even conceptualized.

### ***Teacher Knowledge FOR Practice***

In this first conception of teacher learning, it is assumed that university based researchers generate what is commonly referred to as formal knowledge and theory. This knowledge is then *used*, but not constructed, by teachers to improve their professional practice. Similar to a positivist approach, this conception holds the assumption that there is a truth about educational practices derived from theory (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999).

A further assumption is that a particular body of knowledge, or “knowledge base”, exists that teachers need in order to be successful in their profession. Primarily university-based experts, authorities outside the profession itself, produce this formal body of knowledge, related to both content and pedagogy (Zeichner, 2006; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). In fact, the underlying premise attached to this conception is that there is always an expert of some kind with knowledge to be transferred to those non-experts. Indeed a clear distinction between expert and novice guides this conception.

Proponents of this conception contend that knowing more leads directly to more effective practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999) and that knowledge is something to accumulate through constant updating. This knowledge of content areas and effective teaching strategies *for* creating learning opportunities is used *for* students. Implicit in this conception is the assumption that teachers play a central role in educational change by virtue of their current, “cutting edge” knowledge through teacher preparation and continuing professional development. This notion has governed multiple efforts to

improve education in the area of policy, research and practice by focusing on what teachers know or need to know.

With this conception, teachers receive knowledge to apply in a practical situation at a later date, resulting in little if any knowledge construction by the teachers themselves. The teachers are not regarded as those who generate knowledge or theorize classroom practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). This conception of teacher learning emphasizes different types of knowledge; focusing on *what* teachers know rather than *how* they know what they know. This conception does little in recognizing the prior life experiences of teachers and perpetuates the notion of teachers being “empty vessels” in need of knowledge acquisition (Shaeffer, 1990).

#### Pre-service education and development

Knowledge *for* practice is most commonly disseminated in a University or College setting, where university professors transfer knowledge, with the aim of preparing students for the teaching profession. Although the programs at such institutions vary greatly from region to region (Tambo, 1995), the core areas covered are very similar at most post secondary institutions. These qualities include subject matter content, pedagogical knowledge and skill and attitudes necessary for effective teaching (Cobb, 1999). Teachers are most commonly trained either formally or informally (Tambo, 1995). Formal teacher education, which is commonly referred to as “pre-service” education usually occurs in a university or college setting. Informal education or “in-service” education tends to occur in or around the school setting, after a teacher has been working in the profession. In-service teacher education in the majority world however, often

includes formal teacher education programs commonly referred to as pre-service education in the minority world.

It could be argued that minority world teacher education programs are over loaded with academic course content, leaving minimal time for school experiences – resulting in a weak bridge linking theory and practice. Darling-Hammond (2006) suggests that teacher education programs need to help prospective teachers gain a deep understanding of a wide array of things concerning learning, social and cultural contexts and teaching. To that end, such programs must consider moving out from the university setting and forming much tighter relationships with the schools, engaging in mutually transforming agendas and preparing students to teach in such settings. Among her suggested requirements for pre-service teachers is a 30-week practical experience in which students engage in regular reflection on their practice and work closely with their mentor teacher in the school. It is not merely enough to *provide* these practical experiences; one must know how to *learn* from them (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Zeichner (2006) agrees, stating that pre-service teacher education programs are essential but limited in what they can provide for prospective teachers. Schools must support the continued learning and development of teachers.

Fenstermacher (1994) goes so far as to suggest structural changes in respect to the timing of pre-service formal education in the minority world. He suggests that students should gain some practical knowledge about classroom management, assessment and the curriculum before formal teacher education occurs. He suggests that these first elements should be taught through internships within professional practice schools and that after receiving several years of a mentoring type of apprenticeship approach, students would

then go to the University for certification. At that point, topics in foundations, psychology and pedagogical content knowledge could be successfully explored with the teachers.

Russell (1995) examined the difference between two groups of students' approaches to their science methods course. One was a typical 5<sup>th</sup> year (final year) group and the other was a group that had begun their teacher education program with nine weeks of student teaching. The difference between the two groups, in terms of their beliefs, approaches and understandings, was profound. Those who had been in the classroom for nine weeks had more "need to know" than those who had not experienced classroom teaching.

If such a body of knowledge exists that teachers must know in order to be successful educators, Margerum-Leys and Marx (2004) contend it should be fluid and continuously developing, drawn from a variety of sources and applicable in a variety of settings. Teacher education is hardly the kind of field that lends itself to well-structured, highly deductive theoretical approaches. It is an area in which knowledge is more likely to be developed from experience, trial and error and reflection on practice (Navarro & Verdisco, 2000).

#### In-service education and development

Teachers also acquire knowledge *for* practice through in-services and professional development sessions where experts present ideas, concepts and/or practices to non-experts – usually in the form of "best practices". These sessions may cover topics such as curriculum, class management, instruction or assessment (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Although distinct from general theories and concepts, these "best practices" are identified through empirical research on high performing schools and teachers (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Much such traditional professional development activities however, consist

of irrelevant pre-packaged information, resulting in little learning by teachers. Often times, outside experts have little knowledge of local education systems and conditions or the needs of the teacher as part of the school community (Wilson & Berne, 1999).

It is however, possible for teacher learning to occur in these settings. Shulman (2004) suggests that teachers must be “ready, willing and able”. In other words, they must really have the desire and be able to learn. Specifically, their learning will be a function of their status on the following three interdependent factors: vision, motivation or commitment and ability, both cognitive and practical. She adds that any serious attempts to help teachers change are dependent on those main elements, as they are the backbone of teacher development. Once it is determined that the teacher is motivated to learn, school administrators/facilitators must make the effort to provide both time and space for this learning to occur. In this context “space” refers more to an opportunity or situation than a physical space.

### ***Teacher Knowledge IN Practice***

Rooted in a more interpretive and constructive philosophy, the conception of teacher knowledge *in practice* places the emphasis on knowledge *in action*. It is teacher knowledge that is acquired through experience and deliberate reflection, rather than something that is acquired first and used second (Munby et al., 2001). It focuses on many things including making judgments, conceptualizing classroom dilemmas and overall improvement of the craft (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Teachers’ knowledge is expressed *in* the artistry of practice, *in* their practical inquiries and *in* the exchange of knowledge in narrative modes of anecdotes and stories (Munby et al., 2001). A driving assumption in this conception is that, to a great extent, teaching is an uncertain and

spontaneous craft, which develops *in* response to everyday classroom situations. Here the knowledge that teachers need to teach well is grounded *in* the practice of exemplary teachers (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999).

This conception highlights what and how teachers know, as a result of their lived experiences. It is their “know how” or personal practical knowledge, often tacit and difficult to articulate. They both create and use knowledge derived from action in the classroom (Munby et al., 2001). Teachers pose and construct problems out of the uncertainty and complexity of practice situations, then make new sense of situations by connecting them to previous ones (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). They design “on the go” and are architects of their action – generators of their own knowledge. Teacher learning in this conception is very much situational in nature, as they learn by teaching.

Teachers also learn by doing and reflecting, by collaborating with other teachers, by looking closely at students and their work and by sharing what they see, all *in* practice (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). This learning requires settings that support teacher inquiry and collaboration and strategies grounded in teachers' questions and concerns. To understand deeply, teachers must see, learn about and experience successful learner-centered teaching practices (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Recent studies suggest that immersing pre-service teachers in the materials of practice and working on particular concepts using these materials can also be very powerful for their learning (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Such activities may include analyzing samples of student work, teachers' plans and assignments, videotapes of teachers and students in action and cases of teaching and learning.

### Reflective practice

Teachers can develop their craft through thoughtful reflection. Reflective practice is based on the notion that teachers' knowledge cannot be acquired in isolation from context (Gomez, 2003). By continually refining ideas through experience, teachers can improve their skills and build knowledge in areas of program designing, lesson planning and classroom management. Reflective teaching then, is based on thoughtful decision making that takes into account knowledge about students, the context, psychological processes, learning and motivation and knowledge about oneself (Schunk, 2004). The goal is not necessarily to address a specific problem or question defined at the outset, but to observe and refine practice in general on an ongoing basis. Henderson (2001) suggests that teachers should engage in recurring cycles of instructional study, application, observation and reflection. In other words, that they continuously study new ways to work with their students, decide how to apply their studies to particular circumstances, observe the results of their applications and then reflect on their observation.

Reflective practice has been influenced by various philosophical and pedagogical theories – most significantly constructivism, which views learning as an active process where learners reflect upon their current and past knowledge and experiences to generate new ideas and concepts. Simpson (2002) claims that constructivism is not a theory but rather an epistemology, or philosophical explanation about the nature of learning. It describes both what knowing is and how one comes to know.

Shulman and Shulman (2004) suggest that without reflection and learning from practice, teachers lack the capacity for purposeful change. Richardson and Placier (2001) contend that teacher change is enhanced through deep reflection on beliefs and practices,

which includes an understanding of one's beliefs and knowledge. Research points to teachers developing teaching portfolios, writing cases and engaging in regular discussions of practice (including curriculum design, classroom teaching and assessment) - the aim being to enhance teachers' capacities to learn from their own and one another's experience, with reflection being key to teacher learning and development (Shulman & Shulman, 2004).

### Mentor teacher

It is commonly believed that student teachers encounter most of the learning during their clinical field experience. There is much to support, however, that mentor teachers or cooperating teachers have just as much, if not more, to gain in terms of learning. This may happen more readily if the mentor teachers hold a constructivist belief about the acquisition of knowledge. In this case, interaction with novice teachers would provide the opportunity for cooperating teachers to create their own new understandings, based upon what they already know and believe. Knowledge development and change usually occur when an environment is disrupted and individuals react to changes in their circumstances. In this case, the student teacher is indeed the disruption - albeit a potentially positive one (Landt, 2002).

Mentor teachers do bring key elements to learning as well. Few would argue that experienced mentor teachers have a depth of knowledge about teaching and an assortment of practical skills acquired during the course of their teaching career. Their classroom experience, subject matter knowledge and familiarity with particular teaching settings cause them to be viewed as respected sources of knowledge (Margerum-Leys & Marx, 2004). It is when these two intersect, the mentor teacher and student teacher, that

the space for potential learning is created. New teachers, full of ideas and questions, enter a mentor teacher's classroom with a new perspective. Although their very presence may disrupt the balance of the class, an atmosphere ripe for exploration of new ideas and divergent concepts has been created. It is the mentor teachers who recognize, then act on these learning opportunities by putting them into practice, that become better practitioners as a result of their service as a mentor (Landt, 2002). Landt (2002) concludes:

As experienced educators encounter new ideas brought in by student teachers, respond to novice educators' queries regarding their practices, observe their students from a different perspective and grapple with alternative theories about education and teaching, they enjoy a rich opportunity for the construction of knowledge. (p. 12)

### ***Teacher Knowledge OF Practice***

This conception centers on knowledge that comes from systematic inquiries about teaching, learning, curriculum and assessment (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Such knowledge may be constructed locally but may also be done so within broader communities, as the known and knower are now connected to larger political and social agendas. The aim is to result in transformation of educational theory and practice, by looking at curriculum, teachers' roles and the meaning of schooling. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) contend that "basic questions about knowledge and teaching – what it means to generate knowledge, who generates it, what counts as knowledge and to whom, and how knowledge is used and evaluated in particular contexts – are always open to discussion" (p.272).

In this conception, teacher learning is expanded to roles of teachers as leaders and activists (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Henderson (2001) identifies “transformative teacher leaders” as working toward professional growth of teachers. They are educators who are deeply committed to their own journey of professional growth, eagerly participate in collaborative study activities with their colleagues and willingly assume school reform responsibilities (Henderson, 2001). They collaborate with their colleagues in a spirit of collegial inquiry. This usually happens in various ways, with much overlap – information exchanging, modeling, coaching, supervising and mentoring. Preparing teachers as classroom researchers and collaborators who can learn from each other is essential (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

As previously stated, Fenstermacher (1994) suggests that the critical objective of teacher knowledge research is for teachers to be knowers of the known. Carter and Doyle (1996) agree, stating that teacher knowledge should be about teachers theorizing rather than theorizing about teachers. If teachers are truly to become knowers of the known, this is where it happens. When teachers collaborate to discuss their practice, reflect on their practice and pose questions about their practice, they begin to take on the role of researcher. Any research results then have a strong, authentic insider feel to them, making it clear that the researcher has “been there” (Connelly et al., 1997). Teachers can take genuine ownership of the process by becoming highly involved in defining the purpose of the research, suggesting interpretations of the research and commenting on the final results. Such teacher collaboration is identified in the research as Communities of Learners.

Marcondes (1999) encourages researchers to contemplate who is involved in producing valid, reliable knowledge about teaching. She identifies teachers as key stakeholders who are all too often underrepresented in such research.

Most of the time, research on teachers is not made by teachers but is formulated by teacher educators or research experts on teachers, often ignoring the concrete reality of teachers and the ways they deal with the problems they have to face daily in the classrooms. (p. 4)

### Communities of learners

A powerful form of teacher learning comes from belonging to professional communities that extend beyond classrooms and school buildings, where there are no experts present. Teachers work as equals. Such communities can be organized across subject-matter lines, around significant pedagogical issues, or in support of particular school reforms. They legitimize dialogue and support the risk-taking that is part of any process of significant change. Examples of such communities include school/university collaborations engaged in curriculum development, change efforts or action research. When such relationships emerge as true partnerships, they can create new, more powerful kinds of knowledge about teaching and schooling, as the connection between theory and practice “produces more practical contextualized theory and more theoretically grounded, broadly informed practice” (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995).

Shaeffer (1990) refers to this type of learning as participatory teacher training and identifies its five main characteristics.

- 1) The teacher plays an active role in the training process and is not a passive recipient of others' accumulated knowledge. The teacher becomes an agent rather

than an object of change and is treated as a constructor of his or her own knowledge.

- 2) Training becomes self-directed. The autonomous nature of the teacher in the classroom is recognized in the training itself as he or she is encouraged to assess problems and design and experiment with appropriate solutions.
- 3) Training is based on reflection and introspection. Teacher needs and problems are presented by the teacher rather than some outside expert. Such reflection is meant to lead to greater self-awareness where the teacher looks into his or her own situation and practice to solve problems.
- 4) Training bases teacher introspection on the actual, concrete experiences of working with children in classrooms and schools. Particular situations faced daily are discussed rather than generalities or universals.
- 5) Though based on individual reflection, the training is most often structured by the group. Teachers collectively examine and analyze their experiences and cooperate in solving problems and learning from each other.

Wilson and Berne (1999) have studied teacher-learning communities. They identified salient themes coming from their work as well as other published research on teacher acquisition of professional knowledge. Teachers embrace opportunities to be intellectuals. They enjoy the chance to talk about their work and materials related to their work. They value their connection as part of a community of learners. Teacher learning is more abundant if not bound and *delivered* but rather *activated*. Instead of arranging new teaching knowledge into a package for practice, teachers need to understand their own knowledge and become engaged themselves as learners (Wilson & Berne, 1999).

Teachers do not automatically transform themselves into inquirers simply because new material and resources fall at their feet. They must be in on the creation of the knowledge from the start, which encourages ownership leading to possible change in their educational settings.

The process of learning for a teacher is not isolated within the individual but involves contact with the social and cultural environment. Putnam and Borko claim (as cited in Wilson & Berne, 1999) that interaction among members of communities influences not only what is validated as knowledge, but also shapes the very way a person thinks or reasons. Learning is social in nature and is facilitated through discourse and interaction with others. Willis and Harcombe's study (as cited in Wilson & Berne, 1999) concluded that dialogue, both internal and external, is critical for understanding. Teacher learning then must include regular exchange of ideas among educational practitioners.

Shulman (2004) identifies "communities of learners" as very significant in terms of teacher learning. Working in small groups as well as collaboratively from group to group, promotes learning. She presents a case study of a teacher learning collaboration – an attempt to work with an experienced teacher to redesign his practice in line with Fostering a Community of Learners (FCL) principles and practices. In her study, "Jerry", a well-educated, popular and experienced middle school science teacher, was excited to interact with other teachers and learn about this new program. He saw FCL as a system in which he would facilitate learning rather than control it, but soon realized the extent to which his teaching style differed from the constructivist vision of FCL. He saw himself as a transmitter of information, which was not consistent with FCL principles. In group work, he appeared to adapt the theoretical talk of FCL practice without challenging his

own conception of knowledge. In other words, he had a theory of FCL pedagogy along with a traditional epistemology. He gradually became aware that his view of what counts as knowledge was different from the FCL view. He had not made the necessary epistemological shift from a fact-based conception of knowledge to one that focused on inquiry and constructed knowledge. Although Jerry had little success with the FCL program in his classroom, he learned a great deal about himself in terms of knowledge acquisition and development.

Shulman (2004) suggests that such types of teacher change require much more than one or two outsiders collaborating with groups of teachers to change their practice. It is more about creating conditions that support change. This includes the time and space (usually in the form of reflection) for learning to occur. There must be incentives or compelling reasons to change. There must be encouraging contexts and opportunities for teachers to participate in teacher-learning communities that promote reflection and sustained inquiry. Finally, there must be access to concrete and observable models of teachers engaging in the new practices and/or opportunities to see instances as teachers experiment with new approaches (Shulman, 2004).

It could be argued that there is no single way teachers learn and develop knowledge. Rather, it includes a variety of experiences including gaining knowledge *for* practice, *in* practice and *of* practice, and even *about* practice – both pre-service and in-service as well as formally and informally. Teachers' knowledge is a highly personal and complex phenomenon - as conceptions of learning overlap and intertwine. Although there will always be advocates of teacher knowledge growing in theory and advocates of teacher knowledge growing in practice, the research suggests that most experts support

their combination and work toward strengthening the bridge that links the two. A common theme worldwide however, is that teachers' knowledge development is directly related to the social situation in which it exists and that teachers learn through experience - by being a teacher in that particular social situation.

## **Teacher Learning in Majority World Countries**

Most research on teachers' generation and acquisition of knowledge has been conducted by academics from minority world countries and is deeply rooted in a North American construct. To gain a better understanding of teacher learning in the majority world, more research must be done in such regions, ideally by local researchers and local teachers. Avalos (1990) maintains that more information must be accumulated regarding what is actually going on in classrooms of the developing world in order to fully understand teacher learning and make recommendations for teacher improvement.

Although several conceptions and principles from previously cited research may be applicable to situations in majority world countries, one must use caution when simply attaching such theories and ideas to people, countries, cultures and constructs where much less research exists (Marcondes, 1999). Because knowledge creation is value and context based, it varies from country to county and teacher to teacher. The lived experiences of teachers in majority world countries for example, may be drastically different from minority world country teachers. The political, geographical and economic challenges, along with unique opportunities encountered by majority world teachers are often hidden from the eye of the typical minority world researcher. Ironically, much of the literature related to teacher learning in the majority world points to the assistance of minority world organizations, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

The dominant discourse currently surrounding teacher learning in the majority world is that of in-service development. That is not to say that teachers don't take advantage of pre-service educational institutions in their parts of the world; rather teachers typically teach first and engage in formal education at a later time. In the majority world, the norm is to appoint teachers to the job with little if any training (Marcondes, 1999; Sawyerr, 1997). This is primarily due to the fact that there is a shortage of teachers in many such countries – especially in remote rural areas (Marcondes, 1999; Maekelch, 2002). In effect, learning occurs simultaneously with teaching either through the experience of teaching itself or through professional development sessions and/or classes during the course of one's career.

### *Postcolonial Systems of Education*

Many majority world countries are emerging from over 200 years of colonial rule and domination during which they experienced educational approaches, including teaching methodologies employed in classrooms, that were based on socialization into the culture of their colonial masters (Kanu, 1996). Some hallmarks of this system of education were: the promotion of elitism, the exclusion of the poorer sections of the population, a lack of relevance to local realities and a variance with indigenous knowledge systems, languages, values and beliefs (Crossley & Tikly, 2004; Hickling-Hudson, 2004). In a collection of interviews and speeches (Marcus & Taber, 1983), Maurice Bishop, leader of the Grenada Revolution, stated that:

Perhaps the worst crime that colonialism left our country, has indeed left all former colonies, is the education system...that system was used...to get us to accept the principles of white superiority, to destroy our confidence, to stifle our

creativity, to perpetuate in our society class privilege and class difference...Our educational process, therefore, was used mainly as a tool of the ruling elite.

(p. 42)

Education leaders faced with such lingering effects of oppression are challenged to reform their systems to meet the needs of their current population, which includes a fundamental change in the way people think. It could be argued that this particular time in a country's existence is more of a process or way of thinking than an event, referred to as postcolonialism. Crossley and Tikly (2004) suggest that it is a gradual and often painful process of disengagement from the colonial experience, rather than the sudden arrival of a new era. Hickling-Hudson (2000) suggests that post-colonialism describes both the attainment of independence from the European colonizer as well as the set of practices which embodies the tension in response to the colonialism. It is this set of practices that actually *is* the process of decolonization, which can be defined as a series of actions, usually political, by which territories and countries dominated by Europeans, gain their independence (Betts, 2004). It is the process by which the formerly oppressed begin to demand their own liberation. Characterized by actions, decolonization takes time. It could be argued, in fact, that in the educational arena, this change takes much time, as postcolonial education systems often begin by mirroring previous colonial methods and practices.

Teachers working in recently independent countries are most likely products of the education system mandated by their colonizers; if not the teacher, then definitely the staff responsible for teacher education programs in such countries. It is not surprising then that the ethos of many primary schools and classrooms still reflects a culture

different from that which children and teachers are living outside the school (Taylor & Peacock, 1997). Teachers in such recently independent countries are most likely to continue such practices until their confidence increases enough to resist the current situation and believe in their own authentic liberation. Freire (2003) states that “no pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed...the oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption” (p.54).

One of the most significant effects of colonization is the dominance of the language of the colonizer. French, Spanish and English for example, are currently spoken extensively outside of France, Spain and England. Indigenous languages are pushed to the side as colonizers establish official languages such as French in Cameroon, Spanish in Chile and English in Belize. As language is at the heart of a culture and its people, a clash ignites between the written and the spoken word.

Much literature points to the challenge of teaching children who have had little exposure to the language of school instruction in such regions of the world. In Guatemala for example, teachers are challenged to find ways to teach children who are multiethnic, multicultural and multilingual. Nearly 40 percent of children start school there without a productive knowledge of Spanish – the language of instruction in schools (LearnLink Newslines, 2000). Typically, teachers working in areas with large indigenous populations possess limited local language skills. Many speak the local language but do not have reading or writing literacy and essentially are ill prepared to teach Mayan children in their own languages (Newport, 2004; LearnLink Newslines, 2000). Although opportunities for such learning for teachers are limited, teacher-education programs are beginning to consider the seriousness of the issue. Some are increasing instruction in indigenous

language literacy and cultural concepts, first and second language learning and bilingual pedagogy, multigrade teaching methods and cultural sensitivity to help students transition from home to school (LearnLink Newslines, 2000).

### ***Formal Teacher Education Programs***

Models and practices for developing teachers as professionals differ from one country to another according to resources available, teacher supply needs in the schools, policy guidelines and goals of training (Tambo, 1995). The relatively strict requirement of formal pre-service education in minority world countries, for example, is almost non-existent in many parts of the majority world. What and how teachers learn is often dependent on the context of their individual situation, including location in the world, culture, lived experiences and views of the world in which they live. The timing and extent of formal teacher education in relation to one's career varies from region to region, with many teachers in the majority world attending formal programs after teaching for some time. In the majority world, there are three main possibilities for provision of teachers to schools. Firstly, they may be appointed with no academic or professional qualifications. Secondly, they may be appointed to teaching positions with partial qualifications. Finally, they may be appointed to schools after a complete training program, resulting in related certification. In the case of the first two scenarios, a variety of in-service activities is usually expected as teachers work their way towards becoming fully certified.

With increased world population and the abolishment of school fees in such regions, it would be impossible to place certified teachers in every classroom (Sawyer, 1997; Maekelch, 2002; Kunje & Lewin, 2000). This is not to say that there aren't some

very talented and successful local teachers working in various regions of the majority world. With current conditions however, there are not enough to go around (Hickling-Hudson, 2004). For several decades, many countries in Southern Africa, for example, have faced a consistent and serious shortage of trained teachers. The population of young people is increasing and at the same time the HIV/AIDS pandemic is taking its toll on those in the teaching profession. As the world has entered a new era in terms of knowledge, such countries are struggling to keep up. Many African countries are now faced with the challenge of training new teachers, upgrading existing teachers and extending the reach of all qualified teachers (Connections, 2001).

Knowledge developed at formal institutions is usually somewhat limited for teachers in the majority world. Although most large cities in the majority world house at least one formal educational institution where one can obtain the necessary credentials to teach, prospective teachers are not always able to take advantage of such advanced schooling. Geographical location or financial hardships pose severe challenges to many. Overall, less than half of beginning teachers in such regions in the world begin their teaching experience with any formal teacher education (Sawyer, 1997; SPEAR, 1991; Iyo, 2000; Marcondes, 1999). By the end of their careers however, most of these uncertified teachers have gained partial or complete certification by attending formal schooling usually in holiday time or evenings after teaching during the day (Marcondes, 1999).

Most teacher education programs in the majority world involve course work, usually at a residential institution, followed by some practical work in the classroom setting (Navarro & Verdisco, 2000). Specifically, a university degree in pedagogy, which

takes between three and five years, is required. In addition to courses related to teaching methodology, such programs include educational psychology, educational sociology, history of education and philosophy and politics of education. In addition, students are required to complete practical fieldwork in the classroom for one year.

### *Communities of Learners*

Research indicates there are several programs in operation worldwide that bring teachers in majority world countries together to learn collaboratively. Group training and networking has provided opportunities to examine and reflect on teaching and share experiences associated with efforts to develop new practices. In many cases, the content is organic in the sense that ideas are directly related to the needs of a particular school and its teachers. The common thread in such programs is that it is the teachers who design, implement and evaluate the sessions. As previously outlined, Shaeffer (1990) considers this a form of participatory learning for teachers. He sees teachers engaged in this type of learning in four main ways: cooperative learning, reflective self-instruction, training by simulation and the teacher as the researcher (Shaeffer, 1990). The development of teacher knowledge in these ways, and others, has been explored and documented in many regions of the majority world including Africa, Latin America and India.

Gray (1999) reports on a project in South Africa bringing rural primary science teachers together to exchange ideas at regular meetings. The model revolves around developing a system of self-support through collective effort, where dependence on outside resources is reduced to a minimum. The success of this project may in fact be in the slow, indigenous and evolutionary manner in which it was established (Gray, 1999).

Also in South Africa, Onwu (1999) is using action research and biographical data from successful teachers to improve educational practice and knowledge that encourages teaching behaviours that are grounded in evidence. In Cameroon, teachers are encouraged to join professional teacher associations and to participate in seminars and workshops organized by teacher groups (Tambo, 1995). In Ethiopia, a site based system of in-service teacher development was introduced in 1997 (Maekelch, 2002). Specific schools were selected as special training schools in their geographic location. Regular staff development sessions were facilitated by local primary teachers and based on the concerns and needs of the primary teachers. The teachers' strong commitment to the cluster school-based training led to its adoption as national policy (Maekelch, 2002).

Programs in both Brazil and Peru encourage teachers to participate in professional development that is directly related to the needs of a particular school. They attend weekly teacher directed meetings to discuss professional practices (Navarro & Verdisco, 2000). The Microcentros experience in Chile also provides an excellent example of this type of teacher development. In addition to the benefits of network-based training, the program serves to break the isolation of teachers in rural areas. Despite the fact that the rural teachers face many of the same issues as their urban counterparts, many challenges including multigrade teaching and limited resources, are intensified by professional isolation (Navarro & Verdisco, 2000). Microcentros are not physical places but are seminars that are organized when initiated by interested teachers about particular issues. This program emphasizes training through communication, as teachers learn from their peers.

India's Teacher Empowerment Project now in place in two of its poorest states, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, promotes the increase of the development of teachers' knowledge. The project is based on the idea that local control improves teachers' self-respect and builds trust and cooperation between teachers and communities. The project emphasizes teacher-to-teacher skills training and makes use of resource centers where teachers can exchange ideas (Sawyer, 1997).

### ***The Role of Minority World Organizations in the Majority World***

Evidence of both aid and development projects exists when exploring the literature related to the involvement of minority world organizations in the majority world. Aid, referring to a voluntary transfer of resources from one country to another, can come in such forms as bilateral, multilateral, humanitarian and even development (Tarnoff & Nowels, 2006; Global Village, 2008). Development, on the other hand, implies a process of natural growth happening gradually over time. In reality, however, very few aid or development projects are completely altruistic in nature, as organizations conducting this type of work often come with hidden political agendas. Although this is an important phenomenon and common trend throughout the world, it is not the main focus of this dissertation and is only mentioned briefly here in this section. The involvement of international organizations to help develop human capacity, however, is highly relevant to this study. To that end, the exploration of literature related to such development is warranted.

It was the formation of the United Nations (UN) in 1945 along with the crusade of US presidents Truman and later Kennedy, which really marked the advancement in the field of international development (Black, 2002). Since then, government organizations

as well as non-governmental organizations have continued to attempt to narrow the gap between the rich and the poor, the haves and the have-nots, at an international level. The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) considers sound development programs to be people centered with a focus on human development and human capacity (CIDA, 2004). People are helped to acquire the skills and resources purportedly needed to sustain their own social and economic progress. Such sustainable development ensures the continuation of a stable growth pattern that will enable communities to achieve growth without aid. It is society-centered (Pieterse, 2001) as well as democratic and people-centered (Maser, 1997). James (1996) suggests that the development of human capacity is crucial in any overall plan for sustainable development. He describes development efforts in the majority world as belonging to three categories: indigenous, western and a hybrid of indigenous and western. If sustainability is in fact one aim of international development, it would seem that the hybrid approach would be most effective, guidance from the minority world organization combined with indigenous ideas and needs.

#### Sample teacher education projects

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL), with its headquarters in Vancouver, has been instrumental of late in helping to improve the teacher education programs in many countries in Southern Africa. The COL and eight countries are collaboratively running a program entitled “Training of Upper Primary and Junior Secondary Science, Technology and Mathematics Teachers in Africa by distance”. In January 1998, educational leaders of six of the Southern African Commonwealth countries signed an agreement that allowed their respective ministries to work together in order to meet similar educational needs.

The initial six participating countries were Botswana, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. Mozambique and Zambia joined shortly after to make the group of eight. This initiative was in response to the concern of Commonwealth Ministers of Education who identified the need for trained and skilled teachers in these subject areas.

The Multi-Site Teacher Education Research Project (MUSTER) is a collaborative research project coordinated from the Center for International Education at the University of Sussex Institute of Education in the United Kingdom. It has been developed in partnership with the African countries of Ghana, Lesotho, Malawi and South Africa (MUSTER, 2006). It is focused on generating new understandings of teacher education before, during and after the point of initial qualification as a teacher. Its concerns include exploring how new teachers are identified and selected for training programs, how they acquire the skills needed to teach effectively and how they experience training and induction into the teaching profession. The research includes analytical concerns with the structure and organization of teacher education, the form and substance of teacher education curriculum, the identity, roles and cultural experience of trainee teachers, and the costs and probable benefits of different types of initial teacher training (MUSTER, 2006). The program is designed to provide opportunities to build research and evaluation capacity in teacher education in majority world countries through active engagement with the research process from design, through data collection, to analysis and joint publication (MUSTER, 2006).

### Local educational contexts

With international organizations ready to support them, it is commonly understood that newly independent nations seek out fresh models to replace the practices associated with colonial education (Stuart & Tadoo, 2000). Many times however, minority world organizations enter majority world countries with prepackaged material, hoping to expand teachers' knowledge and education. Simply because certain "best practices" may work in one country or community does not mean they will automatically be transported successfully to other countries or communities. O'Donoghue (1994) refers to this practice as transnational knowledge transfer and describes it as an exchange of theories, models and methods for academic and practical purposes among different countries. Many engage in the process however, without being well informed about the cultural contexts in which the knowledge is applied, resulting in many program failures and resistance in the majority world countries (Kanu, 2005). Zajda (2004) adds that this transferring of educational ideas and practices to majority world countries is often done without taking into consideration factors such as the political climate, traditional beliefs and cultural values, the economy or social class.

Some professional development work that Johnson, Monk and Hodges (2000) did with science teachers in South Africa caused them to rethink their ideas about teacher development and change. It was realized that the ideas brought in by outside experts from the minority world were poorly suited to the practices and challenges that teachers faced in the country of South Africa. "The environment in which teachers work - physical, social and political - act to select a more limited repertoire of behaviour than those providing in-service might imagine" (Johnson et al., 2000, p. 179). The study suggested

that there is a need to research current local practices more thoroughly and to facilitate change through modest steps.

The challenge with such development projects is to ensure genuine and direct influence by majority world participants throughout the process. Members of various development organizations must learn to deconstruct their roles as experts and presenters and reconstruct their roles as colleagues and facilitators (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). This will also help erase the axis of superiority and inferiority, which in turn may lead to confident, productive majority world participants able to generate valuable knowledge and ideas and form visions for their own communities. In the field of education specifically, development requires a greater commitment than any other development activity because it is not a one-time effort but a continuous, labour-intensive process (Sawyer, 1997). It requires skilled, highly trained staffs that dedicate themselves over long periods of time.

### **The Case of Belize**

In many ways, teacher learning in Belize fits the mold of many newly independent majority world countries. Most teachers begin their career at a very young age armed with little formal knowledge related to their new profession. Teachers draw on past experiences with systems of education when beginning to teach and for the most part, learn to teach by teaching. They gain certification if and when they are ready, willing and able. Unlike other majority world countries however, the research on teacher education in Belize seems to focus exclusively on programs at formal teacher educational institutions, both pre-service and in-service. This is somewhat ironic as there is no culture of pre-service formal education or even of professional development in the country

(Penados, 2000). It is refreshing to discover, however, that despite that fact that literature is scant, a significant portion of what does exist has actually been written by individuals native to Belize. Perhaps its small size and limited recognition and familiarity world wide has kept it under the radar of the minority world educational researcher. Perhaps its relatively recent transition into independence has inspired its own academics to write their own histories and tell their own stories, while helping to reform their educational system into something recognizably Belizean (Van Der Eyken, Goulden & Crossley, 1995). It is also useful to note that most of the related literature focuses on the country as a whole, with few studies directly related to the district of Toledo.

### ***Colonial Legacies***

At the time of independence in 1981, Belize inherited a highly inefficient, centralized, colonial driven education system (Iyo, 2000). Much of the curriculum did not accurately reflect the culture, customs and traditions of Belizeans. Education was by no means neutral. Education was for dominance, conformity and autocracy, rather than liberation, transformation or democracy (SPEAR, 1991). Freire (2003) states that “education as the practice of freedom – as opposed to education as the practice of dominance - denies that man is abstract, isolated, independent and unattached to the world...” (p. 81). There is some suggestion that the curriculum used in Belizean schools today is not particularly relevant or meaningful to the students either and does not assist to develop citizens who could be productive and successful in current Belizean communities (Iyo, 2000). The demand for specific skills to perform specialized services in the private service industry has rendered the current system irrelevant to many youths (Iyo, 2000).

As Belize is only 28 years old, it could be argued that most current Belizean teachers are products of this elitist system. Teachers today are challenged to engage their students in relevant and meaningful learning via child centered teaching strategies. Over the past ten years, support has come from educational leaders to provide relevant education to students so they are capable of thinking critically and expecting new challenges. For example, there has been a gradual movement away from the British driven curriculum to material that is more relevant for Belizeans and the Belizean way of life. Some indigenous course content as well as multi-language instruction in schools is also being considered (J. Newport, personal communication, March 21, 2005). A primary school curriculum for the teaching of Mayan and African studies has been created and implemented. There are, however, many areas in the country still extremely isolated and somewhat cut off from the modernization of education in Belize – specifically the remote villages of the district of Toledo.

### Language

Despite the fact that English is the medium for instruction in schools, many children all over the country begin school knowing little if any Standard English. Belizean educators are faced with the challenge of maintaining and advancing students' proficiency in two languages, the mother tongue as well as Standard English. All textbooks and examinations contain Standard English only. As English proficiency for academic reasons is needed, students are sure to be at a disadvantage academically without it (Bradley & Robateau, 2004). Delivering quality education to children in what is literally a foreign language poses a challenge for many educators. It is only possible if the teachers are able to speak the same language as the students in their classes who do

not understand English. Although it is unclear exactly how many teachers are able to provide this service, several do indeed try. It should be noted that such learning difficulties most often occur in rural communities with primary age students. In these areas, and at this age, the children have not been exposed to many of the things, including the English language, that children from larger towns have been exposed to (Winsor & Hansen, 1999).

There has long been a debate in Belize as to whether English should be the language taught in schools. As far back as 1884, Governor R.T. Goldsworthy's annual report identified a need for bilingual teachers to teach the Mayan children (Lewis, 2000). He suggested that teachers would need to know the Mayan dialects and even some Spanish, but would still need to deliver the curriculum in English. Many still believe that minority language speakers should be educated in their first language. As mentioned, many students attending primary schools are not familiar with English and have a difficult time in school. Many educational authorities and leaders support some kind of translingual or bilingual education for Infant I students in the country (Newport, 2004; Bradley & Robateau, 2004). In 1995, the government initiated a process of stakeholder consultation resulting in the publication of "A Language Policy for Primary Education in Belize" (Narain, 1996). The main recommendations of this document led the government of Belize to commit to encouraging the use of the native/home language, where necessary to facilitate learning and to support school and community efforts to teach native/home languages other than English (Newport, 2004). As this was only possible if the teachers themselves could speak the needed language, in 2001, the Ministry of Education in Belize created Language Teaching Support, a teacher-training program that encouraged

primary teachers to use first languages in a planned way in order to help students learn (Newport, 2004).

In 2002, John Newport, a college professor at St. John's Junior College in Belize City, was hired by the Ministry of Education to discover the extent to which the language barrier was affecting student achievement in primary schools in the Toledo district. The students from this district had not been faring very well when compared to students in the rest of the country. They had been consistently scoring lower than any other district in Belize on the Primary School Exam (PSE), which is written in Standard VI. In addition, 20% of Infant I students were repeating that grade, possibly because of difficulty with reading and writing. This number was significant when compared to the rest of the country, at only 12% (Newport, 2004). There was also a high rate of children leaving primary school in the district of Toledo, with sometimes very few students remaining in certain villages to even take the PSE in Standard VI. It was suspected that language ability might have had something to do with the low achievement level in the Toledo District. Newport conducted three main studies.

The results of the baseline tests showed that 25% of the students tested entered school knowing no English at all. Most of the remaining ones showed limited comprehension and only 28% were able to answer questions about themselves or their families. Basically, very few students entering primary school in Toledo were able to use English functionally in school. Newport also looked into the attitudes of teachers to the use of languages other than English in Infant classrooms. Teachers were asked questions about their own background, in terms of language, training and teaching experience. They were also asked to select a form of bilingual education they perceived to be the best

choice for the school in which they taught. Approximately half of the teachers surveyed were in favour of some form of bilingual education. The most popular choice was English with some first language facilitation. English Immersion was the least favoured response.

### Church/State

There has always been a strong connection between church and state in Belize. The state assigns the curriculum and provides a large percentage of the teachers' salaries. The church, however, oversees the management of the schools and is responsible for the hiring, firing and deployment of teachers (Iyo, 2000; SPEAR, 1991). This long-standing dual system of control and administration of formal primary education has been criticized by local as well as foreign officials (Bennett, 2000). The governing by the churches is sometimes not consistent with what the curriculum, outlined by the Ministry of Education, suggests (J. Newport, personal communication, March 21, 2005). In fact, although the church technically works alongside the government, they are for all intents and purposes, independent of it (Van Der Eyken, et al., 1995). For example, if a church school decides to hire an additional staff member, the government is expected to pay his or her salary. If however, a church school decides to modify or ignore aspects of the national curriculum, it is free to do so (Van Der Eyken, et al., 1995).

Members of a national non-profit organization (NGO) in Belize, the Society for the Promotion of Education and Research (SPEAR) suggest that the influence of religion on education issue needs to be looked at more closely. They believe that digging deeper into this relationship may expose the roots of the current crisis in education, stating that few politicians are prepared to cast a critical eye upon the church state system that exists

in education (SPEAR, 1991). Others agree that the church has too much control over what is taught in the schools as well as the placement of teachers. The management team, based out of the local parish, has been known to assign more prestigious teaching positions to extended family members or those who attend church on a regular basis. Woodbury Haug (1998) claims that the hiring of teachers in all schools tends to be based upon the personal knowledge of the individual by the principal and the potential teacher's religious affiliation. Some local educational leaders are beginning to question the role of the church in education and if it may in fact be time for the church to take a lesser role and let the government take more control (J. Newport, personal communication, March 21, 2005). Currently, a large portion of each day is spent on the teaching or practicing of religion. Lessons frequently open and close with prayers. There are no findings to suggest the church discontinue its role, but rather limit its involvement.

Cathers (1998), on the other hand, states that the Ministry of Education has too much control over the teachers, teacher training and curriculum. He speaks of Ministry officials who claim that licensing teachers is an effective means of controlling them. Cathers believes that the Ministry wants quality education and if the teachers use their methods and follow the curriculum, then there will be quality education. He suggests that the end is good but the means is wrong; that controlling a group of people is not the answer. Teachers must be able to use methods that work for them in their specific situations. He feels that managers of religious schools should be able to voice their opinion and offer suggestions relating to curriculum in their individual districts. He claims that currently, denominations are left entirely out of educational decision-making

and that governments are controlling the most powerful influence over what is taught in education – the curriculum (Cathers, 1998).

The most dominant denomination of religious schools in Belize is Catholic. Although British settlers introduced Anglican, Baptist and Methodist religions into early education systems (Bennett, 1991), it was the much later arrival of the Catholic Church that established more significant and widespread control over the education system in the country. The impetus of this shift in religious importance, chiefly because of its close proximity, was the arrival of the United States of America during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Although there were a small number of Catholics in the country (Mexican refugees during the Guerra de Castas), Catholicism made its grand entrance to Belize in the form of Roman Catholic missionaries from Missouri at this time (Rutheiser, 1991).

With access to considerable American financing, these missionaries established many new schools as well as hospitals. By the turn of the century, the Catholic Church was able to provide education to children in more isolated and rural areas than any other religious denomination (Rutheiser, 1991). By 1932, almost 60 percent of the schools in the country were managed by the Catholic Church (Pastor, 1995). Specifically, and of critical importance, was the role that the Jesuit-run secondary school, Saint John's College, played in preparing the leaders of the nationalist movement in the 1940s. Many national leaders in Belize over the years have been practicing Catholics. Catholicism has had the longest and arguably the most profound influence on education in Belize.

### Minority world assistance

From the beginning of this tiny country's existence, foreigners have had a stronghold on Belize. Despite gaining independence from its colonizer in 1981, many systems, including that of education, continue to be shaped by those other than Belizeans. Following centuries of British control, it could be argued that the people of Belize are in fact challenged to make the shift to becoming functionally independent. Natives are accustomed to outsiders entering their country to provide a good or service, and seem complacent to continue this practice in many arenas. This type of assistance, however, has helped to create a society dependent on foreigners; a society that lacks the confidence and motivation to think, work and learn for themselves (Rutheiser, 1991; J. Newport, personal communication, September 22, 2005).

Despite concerted efforts by the Ministry of Education to decolonize education, the foreigner (and his money) remain prominent features of the Belizean school system (Rutheiser, 1991). Although there are more Belizean teachers than ever before, non-nationals are still found in every level and area of education. The provisioning of new schools and the enhancement of the existing ones are almost totally dependent on foreign loans and grants (Rutheiser, 1991). Over the past three decades, the major sources of funding in education have shifted from foreign religious denominations and the British government, to the European Economic Community, Canada and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (Rutheiser, 1991). A major primary education project in 1992, however, saw the Overseas Development Agency (which is British) along with the World Bank, as major funders.

It is true that Belize as a nation is still developing and could benefit greatly from assistance provided by foreign and more developed countries. International organizations, however, do not always take the time to become intimate with the culture and customs of the local people. The educational assistance or reform they are offering is foreign to the locals and in most cases the curriculum is irrelevant (J. Newport, personal communication, 2005). Belize is attractive to many international organizations. It is close to the United States and Canada, is warm, sunny and English speaking. All these aspects make it a popular country for non-profit organizations to conduct work. The problem exists, however, as most organizations spend about a year or two at a time in a particular community. This does not allow them to establish the trusting relationships with local stakeholders necessary for effective change and transformation (J. Newport, personal communication, 2005; O. Woodye, personal communication, August 18, 2006).

Local stakeholders have shown a truly mixed reaction to such assistance and in some cases, have become cynical of outside help (personal communication, J. Newport, 2005). The domestic stakeholders are beginning to resist the temptation to allow “the tail to wag the dog” (as often times, the international agencies insist on providing policies that are alien and therefore not suitable to the local situation) simply because the foreign stakeholders have control of the purse (Iyo, 2000). Former executive director of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) James P. Grant however, was supportive of such outside help stating:

Non-governmental organizations – local national and international ones – have proven their extraordinary capacity at catalyzing people for self-reliant development. Serving as facilitators, usually at community and local levels,

they help create and sustain a dialogue at the grassroots...NGOs enable people's groups to gain access to skills and management training, resources and information. Governments would do well to give greater attention than most currently do to utilize more fully the creativity, effectiveness and commitment of NGOs for the empowerment of people. They must broaden the political space for NGOs to function effectively.

(SPEAR, 1991).

As far back as 1935, influence from other majority world countries has also been felt in Belize. B. H. Easter, the Superintendent of Schools from Jamaica was sent to Belize at that time to review and reorganize the education system. As recently as 2000, Cuba has been sending teachers described as "highly qualified" to Belize to teach both students and teachers Spanish language skills (Hickling-Hudson, 2004). Their salaries are covered by the government of Belize. All Cuban teachers working in Belize have at least a five year degree from Jamaica and extensive teaching experience.

Penados (2000) believes that the government in Belize should stop hiring foreign consultants to solve educational problems in the country and that Belize should develop its own culture of research by involving local teachers and teacher educators in the process. Teachers, as well as teacher educators, understand the problems that plague schools and teachers much better than any outside agency. Tapping into local teachers' insights would also promote innovation and effective professional development.

### ***Formal Teacher Education***

As with many majority world countries, teachers in Belize enter the profession with varying levels of formal education. Although District Education Officers in each of

the six districts encourage all teachers to become fully certified before entering the profession, this is far from the reality. Programs in primary education are generally for in-service teachers (Pineda, 2006).

### Certification

To become certified as a teacher in Belize, one must attend a formal institution for a period of time ranging from one to three years. Although teachers can participate in professional development workshops that count as credit toward their certification, they cannot bypass sessions at formal institutions if they wish to become fully certified (C. Alvarez. personal communication, July 14, 2009).

Belize, and specifically the district of Toledo, does not have the luxury of hiring fully certified teachers as there is a shortage of such teachers and classrooms need to be filled. Instead, teachers are placed in communities to teach, and become partially or fully certified as they work. Despite the challenges associated with attending formal education, educational leaders in the district of Toledo continue to encourage teachers to become certified before they begin their career (E. Assi, personal communication, 2005). The reality however, is that certification requires resources, including money. The economic situation in Toledo, combined with the widely dispersed population, does not permit all those wishing to further their education to do so.

The correct statistics regarding the training and certification of teachers is difficult to locate. While the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in Belize (2006) for example, states that 25% of Toledo's primary teachers were fully trained, versus 49% percent of all primary teachers nationally, Pineda (2006) reports that the percentage of trained teachers is in fact greater. Her work explored the training of teachers throughout

the country, looking at statistics from 2003-2004. At that time, the percentage of trained primary school teachers stood at 52% with the number of trained primary school teachers in the district of Toledo at 38%. Despite conflicting data, the district of Toledo has consistently shown the lowest trained teacher rate over the years. It has been suggested that this may reflect the fact that teachers in Toledo find the financial and social costs of relocating for training too prohibitive.

Lack of teachers' academic background has also been an on-going concern throughout the country. Although a regulation established in 1992 stated that teachers must at least have a high school diploma, at least one in four has only a primary education and teachers in rural and remote areas are generally less well educated and qualified than their urban counterparts (Mullens, Murnane & Willett, 1996). In fact, despite the fact that students in the rural schools do worse on national exams than other students, district leaders continue to place unqualified and inexperienced teachers in these rural areas (SPEAR, 1991), which is a common trend in other majority world countries (Thompson, 1990; Marcondes, 1999; Maekelch, 2002). With the opening of Julian Cho Technical School in 2001, a second high school in a more rural area in Toledo, more students from villages have been able to attend and go on to graduate (Government of Belize, 2004). With this increase in the supply of high school graduates more teachers are now hired with at least a high school diploma.

The on-going issue of nationwide shortage of qualified teachers has been a concern for educational leaders for many years (Iyo, 2000; Mullens et al., 1996), and is one of the strongest shaping forces in educational reform in Belize. The literature supports the Ministry of Education's interest in the improvement of teacher education in

the country as they have put forth many educational initiatives and continue to create major new plans every five years (A. Genitty, personal communication, March 23, 2005). Almost all initiatives however, involve programs related to the university or college.

### College programs

After the first Teachers' Training College opened in Belize City in 1954 (Bennett, 1991; SPEAR, 1991), college programs have seen a variety of changes. In fact, the dominant discourse relating to formal programs for teachers is one of continuous change, as programs evolve into whatever the educational leaders at the time deem necessary (Penados, 2000; Pineda, 2006). Generally, programs have increased in study length with an average of about three years.

Until 1992 the Belize Teacher Training College offered a three-year teacher training program that consisted of two years of study and one year of internship, known as the "two-plus-one" program (Bennett, 1999). This program was essentially to train teachers already in the profession. Teachers attending the program received study leave with pay from the government who also paid for a replacement. Entry into this program required a high school diploma with passes in Caribbean Examination Council exams in certain subject areas or a First Class Teacher Certification. Entry, however, was not automatic as placements in the program were limited. A three year self-study program, requiring the completing of teaching modules, was also offered to students who had only finished primary school themselves. By completing the self-study, students could obtain the necessary certificate required to enter the Belize Teachers College (Penados, 2000).

In 1992, formal teacher education went through some rapid innovations. Belize entered into an externally supported major primary education initiative. It was to run for

seven years at a cost of \$US12.64m (Bennett, 1999). It was funded through major loans from both the World Bank and the Overseas Development Administration (ODA) (an arm of the British Foreign Office), as well as direct input from the Belizean government (Van Der Eyken, et al., 1995; Belize Teachers' College, 1994). Teacher training was one of the main components of this project. The main objectives were to increase the number of trained teachers from 47 % to 80 % by the year 2000 and improve the quality of instruction by placing greater emphasis on the development of teachers' pedagogical skills (Belize Teachers' College, 1994). The increase in certified teachers was not enough, though, as more people were immigrating to Belize from neighbouring countries and qualified teachers were emigrating out of Belize.

After the Belize Teachers' College joined to become part of the University of Belize in 2000, formal teacher education programs became included at various University extensions throughout the country, including the University of Belize campus in Punta Gorda, Toledo. The current route to initial certification is to obtain an associate degree in primary education, which can take anywhere from two to three years. National officials claim that they plan to remove any practicing teachers in the country who do not have at least that minimal certification and replace them with newly certified teachers (C. Alvarez, personal communication, July 10, 2009). This may be slightly optimistic in reality, as many of the newly certified teachers may not want to work in the remote villages in the country, especially in the isolated district Toledo. Officials at the Teacher Development Unit in Belize City are now working on a one year program where students with an associate degree (in areas other than education) can become certified to teach primary school (C. Alvarez, personal communication, July 10, 2009).

### *Alternative Methods and Programs*

Although local authors have recommended the informal sharing of teacher knowledge, both inside and outside the classroom in Belize (Penados, 2000; Gomez, 2003), there is little documentation showing that it exists. The scant literature that does exist highlights local, national and international volunteer organizations working informally with teachers, assisting them to develop professionally. The Peace Corps, for example has been working in collaboration with many Belizean schools since 1962 (Peace Corps, 2009). Peace Corps volunteers involved in educational work are required to live in a community for two years and work with various aspects of the school system, including curriculum design and teacher education. In addition, US colleges including Kennesaw State University, Murray State University, University of Minnesota and University of San Francisco, send pre-service teachers to Belize to complete practice teaching sessions. This has reportedly helped to develop professional knowledge for both the student teacher and the local Belizean teacher (Honeycutt, 2009). Two specific volunteer projects will be discussed further as they are relatively recent and focus exclusively in the remote district of Toledo.

Previously described, Teachers for a Better Belize (TFABB) is a non-profit organization that provides opportunities for local teachers to develop professionally. It has grown in popularity and effectiveness over the years and serves as a consistent annual program allowing teachers to add credits needed toward certification. It has moved from a very facilitator-centered lecture format to a cooperative learning experience for all teachers. Belizean educators embrace such opportunities and value their connection as a group of learners. They enjoy the chance to talk about their work and for the most part,

engage as active participants in the workshops. This is especially apparent with local co-presenters as they bring in lesson plans, teaching charts and samples of students' work to share with their colleagues in these sessions. The program now involves local teachers as facilitators as well as literacy coaches for teachers teaching the same level.

In 1996 the Language to Literacy in Belize program began in two schools in the district of Toledo. The program was launched by the International Reading Association, based out of the US, after an invitation from the Belizean Ministry of Education (Winsor & Hansen, 1999). The program provided both teacher education and literature resources through workshops, demonstrations and much observation and discussion. US volunteers in Belize encouraged the local teachers to make reading aloud a daily activity and to take risks to change the traditional practices (Winsor & Hansen, 1999). "Teachers involved in Language to Literacy in Belize quickly gained the confidence they needed in order to pursue reforms as they observed the children's language development and their enjoyment of their teaching" (Winsor & Hansen, 1999, p. 816). It is unclear if this program is still in operation or what long term effects it has had.

Gomez (2003) contends that there must be more informal ways for teachers in Belize to learn from each other. He believes that in order to grow professionally educators need to reflect on their practice and share and exchange ideas with colleagues. Experienced teachers can share their years of experience informally through conversations and dialogue and formally by developing and leading professional development programs for their colleagues. The classroom experience, subject matter knowledge and familiarity with particular teaching settings of veteran teachers cause them to be viewed as respected sources of knowledge (Margerum-Leys & Marx, 2004).

Newly trained teachers can share the latest pedagogy or offer fresh ideas and perhaps new insights about the teaching/learning profession with both experienced and inexperienced teachers in the classroom. This creates a dynamic symbiotic relationship which enhances educators' professionalism and as well as the profession of education (Gomez, 2003). Teachers would benefit from the establishment of professional associations, small grants to promote innovations and teacher conferences (Penados, 2000).

Despite the lack of documentation, informal community learning for teachers is indeed happening. This study has allowed me to explore and formally share one such learning opportunity (TFABB) adding to the base of literature on the topic.

## Chapter 3 - Research Design

### Methodology

This research is best described as an ethnographic case study featuring teachers in the district of Toledo, Belize. Because my aim was to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of people in a culture unlike my own, from the point of view of those who actually live the experiences, the research is classified as ethnographic in nature (Preissle & Grant, 2004; Spradley, 1980).

Ethnographers have the potential to gain a deep understanding of the beliefs, motivations and behaviours of their participants, by entering into firsthand interaction with people in their everyday lives. Van Maanen (1988) describes ethnography as a marriage between a fieldworker and a culture; “scribes and tribes” working together (p. 2). Compared with conventional quantitative research methodologies, this approach contains a significant degree of subjectivity and has the potential to gather information about human behaviour that is impossible to obtain by more quantitative methods. Typically, such researchers study participants in their native surroundings, in their own settings (Kramp, 2004). Although I was not in the country of Belize studying this culture on a daily basis, I believe my extensive time in the region qualifies me as an ethnographer. Between 2004 and 2008, I spent a combined nine months in Toledo observing teachers, classrooms and learning.

As I framed this study, my thoughts were initially based on my interactions with, and observations of, these teachers at three consecutive summer workshops in Toledo. I became aware of the challenges they faced as teachers and that learning to teach looked

similar to, yet different from, the way I understood teacher learning in my social world in a North American context. I was anxious to learn more about this phenomenon and hear the stories of the teachers. These initial thoughts, combined with the findings of my pilot study, helped to carve out specific research questions that guided my inquiry which in turn, directly influenced the choice of methodology.

This inquiry was guided by a constructivist/interpretive paradigm, or world view, based on the contention that knowledge is socially constructed by multiple realities, intimately connected to lived experiences and influenced by both culture and history. As previously described, Richardson and Placier (2001) refer to constructivism as a way of learning that suggests that individuals create their own new understandings based on the interaction of what they already know and believe and the ideas with which they come into contact. This research was typical in the sense that the epistemology was illustrated by the methods used to gather data.

## **Data Generation**

As participants had varied backgrounds, experiences and realities (framed by my observations in the culture) that would inevitably lead to discussion, one on one interviews were the preferred method of collecting data. Interviews are often used if the researcher believes that the local people's knowledge, views, understandings and experiences are meaningful properties of the social reality the research is designed to explore (Mason, 2002). A large amount of data was also collected via participant observation, whereby I collected field notes in my journal over the course of four years.

## *Interviews*

### Why conduct interviews?

Interviews were selected as a preferred method based on both my ontological and epistemological positions. I hoped that the meaningful conversations I had with teachers in Toledo would lead to the generation and construction of new knowledge that would help with their continued leadership and professional development. I was not aiming to excavate facts for analysis elsewhere, but rather to mobilize indigenous capacities for the self-management of this project and others (Chambers, 1994). It was my thought that interviewing local teachers might accomplish these aims.

Interviews are probably the most commonly used method for collecting data in qualitative research (Mason, 2002). Researchers use this tool to discover things that are not directly observable, including thoughts, feelings and intentions. “Interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behaviour, feeling, or how people interpret the world around them” (Merriman, 1991, p. 72). Spradely (1980) compares ethnographic interviews to friendly conversations, adding that ethnographers gather much of their rich and detailed data through such casual conversations. Speaking interactively with teachers was the most effective means to generate the type of data needed to address my research questions. Since most communication is non-verbal, conducting face to face interviews was also a way for me to access the emotions of the participants. As I was listening to spoken words, I was also interpreting those words, often based on non-verbal cues including facial expressions and gestures as well as intonation and tone. Observing silence and listening for what was *not* said also proved to be significant.

Who were the teachers interviewed?

In this study, I followed two literacy coaches (who were also local primary school teachers) and six local primary school teachers (who were not literacy coaches) over the course of one year. Including both curriculum coaches as well as teachers in this study allowed for some comparative analysis of data. Specifically, it allowed me to compare what was intended to be learned by the coaches and what was actually learned by the participants at the annual workshop and the in-services during the year.

For a variety of reasons, I had little involvement in the selection of the participants for this study. I had been volunteering in the district for several years and had become friends with many of the teachers. Because I was the principal researcher in this study, I might have selected those closest to me or those I thought would provide me with suitable answers. Following the participatory model set by the subcommittee in the pilot study, I enlisted the help of a local teacher, Claret Jacobs (a Toledo teacher and literacy coach), for the selection of the first two participants – local teachers who were also literacy coaches. Claret and I had built a strong friendship over the previous two years as workshop facilitating partners. She was not part of my pilot study, nor would she become a participant in the current study. She was, however, a critical friend to offer me reflective insights on the study. I felt confident she would be able to supply me with the names of two coaches who would share detailed and varied information about their own generation of teacher knowledge as well as an analysis of the Literacy Coaching Program.

Six more Toledo teachers who were not literacy coaches, but had attended the summer workshop and in-services during the year, were invited to participate in the

study. Using a strategy similar to snowball sampling, I asked both of the coaches (whom Claret had selected as the first two participants in the study) for two names each. I took on the task of selecting the remaining two participants and did so based on three criteria. Firstly, I looked at where they lived and worked in the district. It was important to talk to teachers across the entire region, as teachers from small villages would likely have different experiences with the development of teacher knowledge and the coaching model than teachers based out of Punta Gorda Town. Secondly, I looked at those teachers who, based on my brief experience with them at the workshop, were more inclined to provide rich discussion in an interview setting. Finally, I selected two teachers whom I did not know.

I worked with eight participants in this study and do not claim that the interpretation of this data is representative of teachers' knowledge development in Toledo. There were, however, some strong patterns that emerged to me as a Canadian teacher. These patterns were triangulated with my field notes as well as my pilot study.

#### What was asked of the teachers?

The interview questions for this study began with the participants' backgrounds and reasons for becoming teachers. The questions then looked at whether their personal knowledge (based on backgrounds, experiences and beliefs) influenced who they have become as teachers – focusing specifically on their teaching practice. Questions then moved toward how the participants professionally develop in their remote communities. Eventually the focus turned to the overall impact of the TFABB Literacy Coaches Program, including both summer workshops as well as designated in-service sessions

throughout the year. The questions helped identify details relating to the development of professional knowledge used in their own classroom settings.

The questions asked of the teachers who were also coaches, were slightly different than the ones asked of the teachers who were not coaches. I wanted to learn from all of them about how they engage in professional development, but also wanted to know if being a coach had helped them with their own professional knowledge growth. I was also curious to know what it was like for the local teachers to be led through workshops by their peers, as the majority of professional development was, and still is, directed by non-Belizeans.

Although the set of questions were designed before I arrived in July of 2007, there was considerable flexibility in terms of further questioning depending on given answers. It is also significant to note that for the initial design stage of the questions, much of the input came from the three in-service sessions that took place during the school year. I enlisted the help of two coaches (who were not participants in the study) as contact people for me to learn more about the in-services. Their input was invaluable, showing that local people can and should be part of the design and implementation stages of the research process. When such projects are collaborative, teachers become key research participants. They help define the purpose of the research, suggest interpretations and comment on the final results (Connelly et al., 1997). Marcondes (1999) agrees, adding that teachers are key stakeholders and often underrepresented in such research. A full list of questions that guided the interviews for both curriculum coaches and primary school teachers can be found in Appendices C and D.

### When and where did the interviews take place?

The interviews were conducted in the summer of 2007 when I returned to Belize for the annual summer workshop. Follow up interviews with each participant were also conducted later that summer. The interviews occurred at various times and sites in the district of Toledo including schools, homes, offices and restaurants.

After reading and analyzing the interviews back in Canada, I realized there were gaps in my understanding. In addition, I felt that I should have asked additional questions, more generic in nature, to gain a deeper insight into the backgrounds of the participants. To that end, I conducted some telephone interviews in the spring of 2009. Because it was not possible to reach every participant by telephone, I designed individual questionnaires for the remaining participants and sent them to Toledo with TAFBB volunteers, on my behalf. This additional step not only increased validity through coherence, but also added to the overall comprehensiveness of the study (Lather, 2004). Although the participants fully supported me in this step, it is definitely a drawback to this type of research, in that it is not that easy to ask participants for further clarification when they are thousands of miles away.

### How were the interviews conducted?

The interviews were semi-structured in nature and looked more like a “conversation with a purpose” than a formal question and answer session. I gathered all interview data on a standard voice recorder. Placed at the side of the table, it was small and non-intrusive in nature. I also made sure to take brief notes throughout the course of the interview in the event there were technical malfunctions with the voice recorder.

Rather than a large notebook or clipboard, I used a small notepad, as it is usually less threatening to the interviewee (T. Hopper, personal communication, March, 2006).

All data was transcribed and printed out within days of the interview. Because I was still in the community, I was able to take the double-spaced hard copies back to each of the participants for them to read, as a form of member checking. I highlighted sections of the interview where I required further explanation or clarification. I asked them to read over their copy carefully, inviting them to add, delete or change anything at that time. My intent was to make sure that what I had written was indeed what they had meant to say. I contended that exact recordings of words said were less important than what the person actually meant to say. Rinehart (1998) suggests the only way the author can know what the person meant to say is through deep immersion in the culture - in the world portrayed. Although I felt that my experiences in Toledo had helped me with this cultural immersion, I remained focused on obtaining confirmation from the participants. The copy I gave them had ample room for them to make any corrections necessary. All participants provided feedback, with two of them writing additional paragraphs in areas I asked for clarification. I believe that having the teachers read the interviews back, at their leisure, was an effective way to ensure validity. A second shorter interview was then conducted where we discussed the highlighted issues, as well as any additions and/or deletions. I found these interviews to be very worthwhile as the participants seemed to feel more comfortable speaking with me the second time around and were able to dig deeper into issues of concern to them. For example, when I had initially asked one participant about the in-services led by local facilitators, he stated that they were fine, but that he would have preferred a non-Belizean to facilitate. In our second meeting, he quickly expanded

on this, adding that some local teachers do not want to see others do well and do not support each other in various leadership roles. With participant feedback, I edited the original copies and brought them home to Canada with me. All electronic interview data has been stored on my laptop computer, protected by a password, as well as on an external memory drive. Hardcopies are locked in a filing cabinet.

One of the biggest challenges in conducting the interviews was the fact that I was working with people – in reality a double-edged sword. On one hand, engaging with human participants about their own life and work can be extremely valuable. The thick rich description attained through in-depth interviews is a critical asset of this method. On the other hand, human participants are just that - human. They have emotions and can be unreliable and even unpredictable. During some of the interviews participants would often divert, sometimes forgetting the initial question all together. In some cases, it was almost as if I wasn't even in the room anymore as they just kept ranting into the microphone. In addition, some teachers were very apprehensive about signing the consent form, fearing that the information may leak back to their principal or worse, the District Education Officer.

### ***Participant Observation and Field Notes***

The second method for collecting data in this study involved observing people living in their own environment and recording these observations in my journal in the form of field notes. These field notes were taken during my various visits to Belize between 2004 and 2008. The majority of the notes were taken during two week long summer workshops (2006 and 2007) as well as during my three month stay in Toledo in 2005. They have provided me with useful insights to teachers and teacher education in

Toledo. Notes taken while observing teachers in classrooms for example, have helped me to understand the challenges primary school teachers face on a daily basis. The aim was for all such field notes to supplement the interviews by providing evidence and adding richness to the interview data. This experience allowed me as the researcher to explore discrepancies between what I thought participants said and what I observed happening in the culture.

Participant observation was an on-going component of this ethnographic study. Although I found the interviews very informative and interesting, they were *put into context* through my participant observation sessions. The observation notes were the links that connected all the interviews and in fact the glue that held all research data together. In some cases observations added an element of action to the words the participant had said. For example, one teacher spoke about using the weekends to plan units and lessons with family members. I would often pass by his house on my Sunday jogs and stop in to say hello. Sure enough, there was rich discussion going on about teaching and learning. Another teacher spoke about the weekly (and sometimes only monthly) bus ride to Punta Gorda to collect supplies and cash his pay cheque. I observed this man more than once on a Friday afternoon in the long hot line-up at the local bank. Seeing these people in action, helped the words from the interview pop off the page and take on genuine meaning.

Gans (1999) explains that participant observation is still his preferred method of gathering data. He considers it the most scientific method of all, because it is the only one that has the potential to really get close to people. “In addition, it allows researchers to observe what people do, while all the other empirical methods are limited to reporting what people say about what they do” (Gans, 1999, p. 540).

### *Triangulation*

The reader of qualitative research is almost totally reliant on one person's portrayal of events as such accounts can sometimes be nothing more than one person's interpretation (Punch, 1994). To minimize this risk and to increase credibility and validity, qualitative researchers cross-reference their data using other methods, known as triangulation. Methodological triangulation synthesizes data from multiple sources such as interview, observation and physical evidence to study the same unit. Using this strategy during data collection is a definite strength in case study research as flaws in one method may end up being strengths of another method (Merriman, 1991). As mentioned in the previous section, there was more than one method of collecting data in this study. More often than not, the words spoken in the interviews were confirmed and/or enriched through physical action by participants.

As with all interpretive studies, the researcher must be careful not to invent or misrepresent the participants' perspectives (Mason, 2002). One of the most effective strategies to use to minimize this risk is to incorporate some kind of "member checking". A type of triangulation, it involves participant debriefing and/or participant corroboration (Preissle & Grant, 2004). The researcher must decide what form this will take in terms of a review procedure used by the participants (Janesick, 2003). In this study there was much member checking. As previously explained, I provided participants with interview transcripts as soon as possible after the interview, encouraging them to add, delete or change any part of the transcript they wished to. Lather (2004) agrees with this process stating that "the researcher should provide the case study participants with a copy of the draft and ask them to corroborate or question any of the information or assumptions that

have been drawn” (p. 233). Ethically, the participants needed to feel that the transcripts were accurate representations of their realities.

Later in this discussion, I attempted to represent the data in ways that would be meaningful to the people for whom they are intended and described in language they understand. “If local people think the results make sense, they will be able and willing to use the analyzed data to improve their practice and programs” (LeCompte, 2000, p. 154). Without triangulation, specifically careful member checking, the results would not be able to help those who may be interested in it. It was imperative that I “got it right” or at least “right enough” to be coherent to the participants.

### *Participants*

Participants in this study were primary school teachers from the district of Toledo, Belize with varying ages, ethnic backgrounds, levels of formal education and teaching experience. The intent of this section is to provide a general description of each participant, serving to aid the reader with the remaining sections of this paper. Pseudonyms have been used to provide anonymity, protecting the identity of participants. As a point of clarification, pseudonyms were also used in the opening story for Chapter 4, “Maria’s Journey” as well as all participants in my pilot study. A sample letter of consent for all participants in this study can be found in Appendix E.

Table 2 shows the general demographics of the participants in this study. As there is a close relationship with the church and the state in Belize, religious affiliation of each participant is included. In a sense, the categories in the table represent cultural-historical influences that ultimately frame these teachers’ ways of knowing.

**Table 2 General demographics of participants**

	Sex	Age	Ethnicity	Religious Affiliation	Age at start of career	Current school location/type
Mary	F	44	Creole	Nazarene	17	Town/ Methodist
Olivia	F	38	Garifuna	Catholic	27	Rural Village/ Catholic
Nalla	F	29	Maya Mopan	Catholic	21	Village/ Catholic
Dora	F	25	Garifuna	Catholic	19	Rural Village/ Catholic
Anne	F	42	Garifuna	Catholic	18	Town/ Catholic
Diego	M	33	Maya Mopan	Catholic	18	Rural Village/ Catholic
Juan	M	30	Mestizo	Catholic	19	Rural Village/ Government
Simon	M	42	Garifuna	Catholic	19	Village/ Catholic

## Mary

Mary is a 44 year old female teacher of Creole descent. She has gained extensive experience in the profession, having taught for 24 years. When she graduated from high school, she saw two main choices for a profession: a teacher or a nurse. Because she had always admired her teachers and had no interest in delivering babies, she chose teaching. Several family members were already teachers and helped convince her to join the profession. She grew up in a family with twelve siblings and loved to play “teacher”, with a pointer. She has five children of her own. One of her daughters, as well as ten other family members are the profession.

Mary finished high school and began teaching at the age of 17. She started in the challenging rural areas of Toledo where there was no electricity or refrigeration. She explained that transportation was also problem back then. She would camp in the village from Monday to Friday and then hoped to be able to get a ride back in Punta Gorda for the weekend. When in town she would stock up on canned goods to take back to her village. She lived and worked like this for a number of years. Eventually she moved to Punta Gorda and was assigned the vice principal position at the large town school. After twelve years there, she tired of the Catholic system and returned to a small non-Catholic school just outside Punta Gorda, where she was a teaching principal for two years. Mary believes that colonialism still exists in Toledo today – that the Catholic Church has taken the place of the colonial masters, whereby they control who is hired and fired in the schools, sometimes not taking into account qualifications or teaching effectiveness. Mary now teaches at the Methodist school in Punta Gorda Town.

Mary has been a powerful leader in the district, always an advocate for the children and their education. She was instrumental in starting a feeding program at one of her schools providing hot lunches to needy children in the school. This program is still in operation today. She is an advocate for children with special needs and also teaches at the University of Belize in Punta Gorda. She is a valued member of the TFABB literacy coaching team and works hard with teachers throughout the year, helping them with their professional development.

### Olivia

Olivia is a 38 year old female teacher of Garifuna descent. She comes from a family of teachers and had wanted to be a teacher from early on. Her grandfather suggested that she stick to the family tradition, so she and her sister both became teachers. At first she thought about nursing – the other job available for female high school graduates, but realized that long nights shifts spent at the hospitals was no way to spend time with her young children. Olivia comes from a family of seven children, and now has seven children of her own.

Olivia's journey to becoming a teacher was unique. Although she had a strong desire to teach, her husband's job always prevented it, as they moved from district to district around the country. While her husband was working, she was having babies and dreaming of the day she would teach. After 15 years as a policeman, her husband resigned, allowing them to settle in Toledo where Olivia could pursue her career. While he was working, she managed to obtain her level one certification, making her one of the few Toledo teachers entering the profession with more than just a high school diploma.

In her ten years of teaching, Olivia has become fully certified and is seriously considering continuing for another year to obtain her bachelor's degree. She is a member of the literacy coaching team and has participated as a facilitator at the TFABB summer workshop. She is currently a teaching principal at a school in a very remote area south of Punta Gorda. She is fortunate to have a vehicle and travels to Punta Gorda on the weekends.

Working in a small village affords Olivia many freedoms she may not otherwise have working in Punta Gorda Town. She feels that in town, people are always watching you and you are pretty much always under a microscope. In her small village she can experiment with different teaching strategies and be part of community where she can learn a lot about her students as well as herself. Despite the fact that she loves it there, she feels that there may come a time when she becomes stagnant and is already thinking about relocating after her next session of schooling.

### Nalla

Nalla is a 29 year old female teacher of Maya Mopan descent. She admired her teachers throughout her school life and decided that it was a profession to which she was called. She had always been an avid reader who sought out information about teaching as well as the world in general. From early on, she had an awareness of the disparities that existed in the world and felt a deep desire to help the people in her own village. She wanted to make a change, and with her contributions, she thought she could make her country more developed. She likes to see young children with young children – working together to make positive changes in their lives. Her biggest influence in becoming a

teacher was her mother, who is illiterate. She encouraged Nalla to become a teacher to help the children in their village so that they would not end up like her.

Because Nalla knew that she wanted to be a teacher, she enrolled in a junior college in Belize City right after high school. Her two years there helped to further her academics, but according to her, did little to prepare her for teaching. She returned to Toledo and was assigned to a remote village to begin her career. After one year of teaching she headed back to Belize City and enrolled in Belize Teachers College where she obtained her level one certification. Nalla has now taught for eight years in total and is living and working in the same village in which she was born and raised.

Although she would like to continue her schooling, the thought of it is daunting. She would have to teach all day then travel to Punta Gorda to attend classes and then return to her village at night. Without a vehicle, she would have to travel on unreliable buses for the two hour round trip. She feels that she would not be able to do both of these well. For now, she is satisfied that she is making a difference in her community. She is a confident teacher who truly has a thirst for knowledge. She is motivated to continue and continues to motivate her students.

### Dora

Dora is a 25 year old female teacher of Garifuna descent. She did not always want to be a teacher, but was convinced by family members and friends. Her main motivation for becoming a teacher was to share her knowledge with younger people. She had already completed some University courses when she decided to enter teaching and felt she really wanted to share what she was learning.

Dora has always worked in rural villages, some more remote than others. In her six years of teaching she has worked in four different villages. Most of the time she was able to live in Punta Gorda and commute, but that was not always the case. She spent some time working in a village right on the border to Guatemala, and had to live in that village. Dora is now a teaching principal at a multigrade school near the district border. She teaches early primary students at her Catholic school.

### Anne

Anne is a 42 year old female teacher of Garifuna descent. She comes from a large family which was common at that time, as contraceptives were not available. Anne thought about becoming a teacher when her high school teachers passed out brochures for the job. There were virtually no requirements - all you had to do was fill out some forms and you were a teacher. The biggest factor influencing her career choice however was the dominance of teachers in her family. The youngest of eleven children (nine boys and two girls), she watched three brothers and one sister become teachers. Her father was also a teacher. Although she was not convinced it was the profession for her, she decided to follow the family tradition. There were many family discussions about the profession. Her family would speak of all the wonderful things they accomplished and it seemed like a good thing to do. She wanted to experience what it was they were talking about. In addition, there were very few steady jobs in the district. Teaching was something that was going to provide a stable job and regular pay cheque. She was the youngest in her family and she needed something reliable as she felt somewhat responsible for her aging parents.

With only a high school diploma, Anne began teaching when she was 18 years old in a village just outside Punta Gorda. As Punta Gorda was her home at the time, she

was able to ride her bike the short distance of four miles. After working in this village for two years, she became pregnant and was forced to resign as she was not married. After giving birth to the child and marrying the child's father, she reapplied to teach and was accepted, but assigned to a very remote village – in her words “to pay for my sins”. She moved to the village with her baby. Her husband was a soldier and was often not with her.

Anne worked hard to become a fully certified teacher. She took some night classes in Punta Gorda and spent one year at the University of Belize in Belize City. She has had a very supportive family throughout all this, juggling her studies and her five small children. She has now been teaching for 21 years and currently teaches early primary students in Punta Gorda Town.

### Diego

Diego is a 33 year old male teacher of Mopan Mayan descent. At first he thought about teaching as something that was demanding and challenging....something to run away from. When he looked further into the possibility of it as a career, it looked like a good fit. His sister was a teacher and eventually convinced him to try it out. He also had a brother in the profession.

Like most teachers in Toledo, he gained much experience in rural communities and has taught in a total of six villages in his 15 year career. He currently teaches upper division in the village in which he was born and raised – a Catholic school in a Mopan Mayan village, very far inland close to the Guatemalan border. There are six teachers in his school, all teaching multi-grade classes.

Diego began teaching right after high school, with no formal teacher education. Since then he has obtained his level one certification, but would very much like to attend teachers' college one day to gain a deeper understanding of his profession and upgrade his qualifications. He is self-motivated and spends some of his spare time reading material that can help with teaching. He reports he is able to find such resource materials from relatives who often help him with his professional development.

Being a teacher has had a positive influence on Diego. He described himself as being a little "rough around the edges" and knew that as a teacher he would be considered somewhat of a role model to children. He curbed his ways and began to lead a straight and narrow life. He feels he has made a positive career choice and plans on continuing to educate the children of his native village.

### Juan

Juan is a 30 year old male teacher of Mestizo descent. Upon graduating from high school he pondered his choices of career: policeman, soldier or teacher. Because he loved being around children and was not fond of the idea of being in the military, he chose teaching. He had a strong background in arts and crafts and wanted to share his talents with children. Another factor influencing his career choice was the potential influence he thought he might have with the younger generation. He reports that many Belizeans, including children, have negative attitudes and need positive role models in their lives. He feels that children must be taught to read and write if they are to succeed in life.

In his three years as a teacher, he has worked in very remote areas of Toledo, mostly at Catholic schools. His very first job assignment was in an area he had not even heard of, despite being born and raised in Toledo. It was a village of about five families,

nestled in against the Guatemalan border. The first time he went out to the village, the rivers had flooded and the bus stopped at the first river. He had to walk the rest of the way with all his luggage and he could not take it all. He was unaware that in order to get to his school, he would be walking through mud, crossing rivers on foot and going to the bathroom in the bush. He also lived in this village and would come back to Punta Gorda on the weekends, a trip that took an entire day.

After some time, Juan moved to a government school as he was forced to leave the Catholic school system. He was basically given a choice: marry his partner within one month or leave. He was tired of the Catholic system regulating his personal life, so he made the switch to a government school. Juan now works about 45 minutes outside of Punta Gorda Town. He is an active participant in TFABB workshops and continues to be an advocate for children in his village.

### Simon

Simon is a 42 year old male teacher of Garifuna descent. He chose teaching as a career by eliminating the other two possibilities for educated young males at the time – policeman or soldier. He understood that there were very few outlets for young people in terms of occupations and realized that teaching would be a steady profession where he could make a difference in his community. He is the only participant in this study who reported no family influence in his decision to becoming a teacher, as none of his family was in the profession. He is the oldest of nine children; many of his siblings have left Belize and are now living and working in the United States.

With only a high school diploma, Simon began teaching at 19 years of age. At the start of his career, he lived in a small village – his school however, was a 2.5 hour walk

(each way) from that village as there was no road at the time. His school was full of students who only spoke the local Mayan language, of which he did not. Despite the fact that English was deemed the language of instruction in schools, he felt that it was his responsibility to teach them in a language they understood. He listened carefully to his students, as *they* taught *him* their native tongue.

Simon made a monthly trip to Punta Gorda for supplies and provisions such as flour, sugar, salt, kerosene and canned goods. He would leave at about 2:00 pm on the Friday hoping he could find transport for the trip to Punta Gorda Town. He would then go about his business and return the next day making sure he arrived in the village in time for school on Monday.

Simon has now been teaching for over 20 years, mostly at Catholic schools in rural communities. Along the way, he furthered his education and is now fully certified. After living and working in several different villages, he eventually moved his residence to Punta Gorda where he gained employment in a large town school. After a short stint at this school, Simon decided to continue his career back in a small village again, commuting from Punta Gorda each morning with a colleague.

He is currently a teaching principal at a school 30 miles outside of Punta Gorda. There are six teachers at his rural school, each teaching a multi-grade class. He chose to work in this village, over a position in Punta Gorda as he finds there is less stress in a village than in the town. In Punta Gorda town the expectations from the community, the parents and the management are all higher. Teachers are expected to be experts in their profession, act as role models in the town at all times and attend church regularly.

Simon takes an active interest in everything that is going on around him and is naturally inquisitive. He has a deep understanding of teacher education in the district and is often involved in discussions with teachers about “what was, what is and what might be”. Simon is a dedicated and respected teacher in Toledo. He has taken on numerous leadership roles in his community and participated as a literacy coach for three years as part of a TFABB initiative.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical concerns are to be expected when one is studying and writing about other peoples’ lives – especially people from such a drastically different culture than that of the researcher. In this case, the most obvious issue was the fact that this research project was conducted in a foreign country, thousands of miles away from my home. It would have been unethical to enter someone else’s country and begin an investigation on their system of education, without consulting the authorities at the very least.

### ***Paperwork***

All necessary paperwork for such research was completed when I conducted the pilot study in the Fall of 2005. There were two parts to this process. The first involved the Ethics Committee at the University of Victoria, where I was a graduate student. After approving my pilot study, some adjustments and amendments were required in order to approve the dissertation research. The University of Victoria Ethics Committee accepted the adjustments I outlined and fully approved this research project on March 26, 2007 (protocol approval number 05-280). Start date: October 19, 2005. End Date: October 18, 2008.

The second part of the paperwork involved the national and local educational administrators in the country of Belize. It was important for them to understand my intent and purpose of study. I began by travelling to the capital city of Belmopan to meet with the national education administrators. My university supervisor prepared a letter introducing me as well as the potential background research I planned to conduct. I met with the Deputy Chief Education Officer of the country, Mr. Alan Genitty as well as Ms. Yolanda Gongora, the Director of General Education Services, to review my work. Despite the fact that neither of them had met me before, they did not seem at all threatened by my presence. They were familiar with Teachers for a Better Belize (TFABB) and its work over the years. Volunteering with an organization that had been working in the country for ten years gave me the credibility necessary to be perceived as a colleague in the field of education. They were supportive of my research and appreciated the fact that I had included them in the process. They directed me to the University library in Belmopan where I found additional people willing to assist me as I searched for information about the history of education and teacher education in Belize. Middle aged nuns supervising in the student library were quick to show me where the photocopiers were and to help me log on to the school computers. The relaxing and friendly atmosphere enabled me to take my time and be thorough with this part of my investigation. I had gained full support at the national level and was pleased with our discussion meetings.

I returned to Punta Gorda to explain my study to the educational leaders in the district of Toledo. I knew the district administrative team well, including Oscar Requena (District Education Officer) and Telesforo Paquil (Manager of the Catholic Schools).

Informing them of my research ideas on my fifth visit to the district proved to be very non-threatening. As expected, they were keen to know more and how they could be of help. Both local and national educational administrators subsequently wrote the required letters of support that were forwarded to the University of Victoria Ethics Department.

Completing all necessary ethical paperwork was the first and most logical and transparent step. I knew there was much more to the process than that though, and that researching in such a situation would require me to dig deeper into how I perceived these people, how they perceived each other, how they perceived me and how I perceived myself as part of their world.

### ***Researcher's Position in the Research***

It was necessary for me to critically examine my position in this process on an ongoing basis and in a reflexive manner. My extensive majority world travel prior to this study had helped me gain a general understanding of the way and pace of life in countries similar to Belize. I knew my work would cross cultural, religious, colonial and language barriers and knew not to expect things to be similar to my way of life. I had come to appreciate the differences in cultures across the globe and understood the value and necessity of patience and respect in such parts of the world. Basic communication in Belize, for example, differs from that in the minority world. People do not run around with day planners, pagers or palm pilots. Rather, they communicate with people and schedule important meetings on the street as they are taking their children to school or at the fish market as they are weighing the daily catch. As an independent researcher, it was important for me to understand the traditional cultural framework within which these people organized their lives and work. Rather than viewing culture as a roadblock, I

needed to tap into such traditions and culture, highlighting such traditional knowledge and skills in this research.

An ongoing ethical concern for me was the potential to have “power over” the participants. I had come to learn that the colour of my skin played a significant role in how I was perceived by the people with whom I interacted. I was readily labelled as someone with power, privilege and money. In addition, I worked as a volunteer with an organization that contributed a great deal of time, energy, materials and money to the education system in Toledo each year. Naturally, it would be in the participants’ best interest to tell me, in effect, what they thought I wanted to hear.

My continued role with TFABB, however, has helped to somewhat debunk this conception related to power existing on an axis. Having worked with the teachers for consecutive years, we have come to know each other and respect our working and learning environments as places of risk-taking with respect to learning. Although this provided a unique insight into the insider’s perspective, my ethnicity has kept me, and rightly so, an outsider. I cannot pretend to know what it is like to be a native Belizean. For this reason, and others, it was critical to engage local people who *were* living the reality, in this research.

Erasing such labels of power, which in most cases are unwarranted, does not happen overnight. I am still not sure how one knows when the power is equal between all participants in such a process, or when transformation of power has occurred. Perhaps power and control are more dynamic and move from one person to the next; something that circulates, or rather as something which functions in the form of a chain (Kothari, 2002). Although I felt the power move from me, to them, to us, I still felt they perceived

me as the one with more of the power. I expect that transformations of such magnitude do take a considerable amount of time.

An issue of consistent significance throughout this process was remaining objective while wearing two distinct hats. Firstly, I worked as a volunteer in this foreign country on a regular basis, as a member of an international non-governmental organization (NGO). Secondly, I was an independent researcher conducting research in this country; an outsider attempting to gain an insider's view. There has always been much emotion, passion and camaraderie with TFABB. My history as a volunteer in the region added a significant dimension to the project as I had much previous knowledge about their teaching world. My attempt at being an objective, detached and unbiased researcher was made difficult by the fact that I already knew how certain things worked in the social and educational world of Toledo. For instance, when teachers explained that access to the internet was almost impossible, I knew that the computer lab at the district education office in Punta Gorda was open on weekends for the teachers to use. Although it is possible that access to the lab and/or developing the skills to use such a lab may have been a challenge for some, there were plenty of teachers who readily had access as well as the necessary skills. I wanted to conduct the research in an ethical and respectful way, but at the same time create spaces to challenge my participants as well as future readers of this work, to think outside the box and move to a deeper understanding of one another in their social and working lives.

As the research progressed, I became increasingly aware of the fact that I was one of many people/organizations doing research and/or providing assistance in this region of the world. Overall it seemed that many organizations had helped shape temporary

transformations, but long-term effects or signs of sustainability were not always realized. Past research in the area, for example, has led to projects that began strong with good intentions, but then faded drastically when the money ran out (J. Newport, personal communication, March 25, 2005). Local stakeholders have shown a truly mixed reaction to such research and assistance. Maya leader Gregorio Ch'oc has worked for years to protect the Maya people's rights with respect to land and resources in southern Belize and believes strongly in the value of local people's knowledge. The following words display his frustration with researchers in the region.

Toledo must be one of the most studied places in the world. The anthropologists, the scientists, they are always coming here to study the people and what we know. But they go away and nothing changes for us.

(Twigg, 2006, p. 29)

Ultimately, I perceived myself as a visiting colleague in this research. I attempted to create the framework, time and space for learning and development to occur, simultaneously learning about indigenous knowledge and needs. I genuinely hope that our work together will lead to something positive and sustainable. My standing commitment to these people is to *listen* and to encourage them to be heard by continuing to tell their stories. Sadly, my colleagues in Belize tell me that the ethnicity of the author is the primary reason their stories actually have a chance *to* be heard.

## **Analysis of Data**

As I attempted to transform the data into research results I began to ask myself what it was that counted as data or evidence in relation to my research questions – how my interviews and field notes were going to transform into useful information (Mason,

2002). The results displayed the multiple truths that exist for the teachers in Toledo and were read and analyzed at different levels.

As an overarching guide I used Mason's (2002) suggestion of choosing to read the data literally, interpretively or reflectively. Logic told me that attempting to express a literal reading was the first step. I also knew that interpreting what the data meant was crucial for this study, as an aim from the inception was to assist the local people. I needed to know what the result meant for the local people and more importantly, the local teachers themselves had to understand my findings, and in fact, be the knowers of the known. This part of the analysis involved making educated guesses as to the meaning hidden under and between the words themselves. It wasn't until much later in the process, however, that I realized the significance of reading the data reflectively. Once I wove myself into the results I was able to locate myself in the research and analyze my role in the process. Reflection was necessary in order to understand what the results meant to me as well as other educators in the minority world. It is fair to say that in this study I read the data at all three levels and most definitely *constructed* a version of what I thought the data represented.

Moving forward with Mason's outline as a guide, I began by simply organizing all data materials. This included making copies of all transcripts, putting all field notes into files, carefully labelling files and boxes. In this study it was particularly important for me to organize all print material well, as mere geography made it next to impossible for me to repeat an interview session. Once things were organized, I began to look for specific items to code, count or assemble into research results. The most common way to accomplish this is by repeated readings of field notes and interview transcripts, looking

for frequency, omission and the like (LeCompte, 2000). I printed each interview on a distinct colour of paper, then began the search for individual points or ideas. I made a large web of these items, by physically cutting the actual interview comments into sections and placing them on a large bulletin board. I identified these as individual domains or categories of cultural knowledge (Spradley, 1979) located within the interview data. This helped me initially to unpack the interview texts in search for important ideas. For example, teachers expressed formal education as one means of learning to teach, so I placed any part of the interviews that related to that topic under the cover term “formal education”. Soon I had a colourful literal representation of the data, with multiple cover terms.

In an attempt to be more specific and add detail I then created stable sets of items, which involved organizing the items or nodes into groups or categories by comparing and contrasting the items (LeCompte, 2000). The aim here was to assemble items that seemed to go together logically. Spradley (1979) refers to this process as making a taxonomic analysis, whereby one looks at all the symbols or ideas and group them by domains of knowledge. For example, after looking at all items listed on my web, I realized that more than one item referred to “village teacher education”. In this section I gathered interview data on knowledge in practice, peers/colleagues and NGO workshops, as they all related to teacher learning in small villages. A visual representation can be seen in Figure 4.



Figure 6 Taxonomic analysis of village teacher education

At this point, I temporarily left the world of webs and charts and entered the world of writing. Following the recommendation of my supervisor I began to “free write”. Being a teacher work of language arts, I was familiar with this and was keen to put some ideas down on paper. I thought carefully about what was beginning to emerge in the data and wrote about one idea at a time. Although I knew that eventually only some of what I had written would be included in the final dissertation, all of what I had written was useful in terms of moving me forward in the analysis. Miles and Huberman (1994) stress the role of the writing process itself in the context of discovery. They argue that “writing, in short, does not come after analysis; it *is* analysis, happening as the writer

thinks through the meaning of data in the display. Writing is thinking, not the report of thought” (p. 101).

As with the writing process, writing this piece was anything but linear. In fact, as I was writing about emerging themes, I found it necessary to return to a much earlier step – that of collecting data. It wasn’t until I was putting the pieces together in the written form, that I realized I needed more information from the participants.

After multiple pieces of free writing were produced, I went back to the web in an attempt to detect patterns by asking some contrasting questions. Researchers assemble these patterns by looking at each set of data and asking the same question. In this study, for example, I looked at interview transcripts as well as field notes and asked, “How is the development of teacher knowledge manifested in each of these pieces of data?” This involved looking for some of the same characteristics that were used to identify the “items” initially. Spradley (1979) refers to this as making a componential analysis, which is a systematic search for the attributes associated with cultural categories. From there one can design a chart which helps patterns and ideas appear in a more systematic manner. I began by creating a simple chart outlining the demographics of the participants in the study (shown in Table 2). This helped me to compare the basic demographical attributes of the teachers in the study. It soon became clear that in order for me to complete my data analysis, I would need to create multiple componential analyses at different levels. Each one I created became more complex in terms of cultural factors and dimensions of contrast.

Following Spradley’s (1979) suggestion of locating themes in research by examining the dimensions of contrast from several domains, I took a closer look at my

componential analyses. Using the various componential analyses helped me to identify themes, the final step the data analysis. A theme is essentially a statement, more often tacit than not. It is an assumption of a culture based on the observations that certain actions, or ways of being, repeat themselves over and over in that culture. A theme may not always be obvious. As an outsider I sometimes had to read between the lines or in some cases just connect the dots. To an insider (someone who is living the reality) though, it is already known - some may be more conscious/aware of it than others, but they know it, as they are living it. A theme connects with and even happens because of, other themes. For example, one common way of being in a culture may lead to another common action. An example from this study would be the overarching theme of control by management. A sub-theme, or result of that theme, could be interpreted in the low level of morale of some teachers; the oppressed continuing to oppress. For this ethnographic study, I employed Spradley's (1979) definition of theme as I worked through my data: "any cognitive principle, tacit or explicit, recurrent in a number of domains and serving as a relationship among subsystems of cultural meaning" (p.186).

Being a visual and spatial learner, I worked my way through each theme with a gigantic white board. When examining a theme related to the relationship between the theory and practice of teaching, for example, I constructed a chart outlining various established learning theories. I then made connections in the data with each theory and outlined my personal insights for each. Figure 5 shows one column on this chart detailing evidence and examples from the interview data relating to various learning theories. The blue section covering the bottom two thirds of the chart for instance shows examples and/or quotes from the data illustrating constructivist learning for the teachers. Some

dimensions of such learning involved working with peers, facilitating workshops as well as learning by teaching through trial and error.

	EVIDENCE/EXAMPLES FROM BELIZEAN TEACHERS	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lesson plans/weekly schemes (organizing mandated curriculum around learning outcomes + performance indicators)</li> <li>• formal schooling (change in behaviour... teacher centered to ch centered (Anne))</li> <li>• "learning is a change in behaviour" (Mary p.6)</li> <li>• TFABB workshop - read aloud - Anna p. 3</li> <li>• followed principal + watched how he taught (Diego p. 2)</li> <li>• watching TFABB presenters (Nalla p. 3) (modelling)</li> <li>• watched TFABB model a lesson (Simon p. 6)</li> <li>• watch peers/mentors (Mary p. 6)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• S</li> <li>• 10</li> <li>• pri</li> <li>• rig</li> <li>•</li> <li>• ce</li> <li>•</li> <li>• i</li> <li>• the</li> </ul>
parts)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• formal schooling</li> <li>• reading books - teacher guides (Diego p. 2) (Nalla p. 5)</li> <li>• "given a book to read" (Simon p. 6)</li> <li>• "was able to put a name to things I was already doing (through formal schooling) (Mary p. 3)</li> <li>• learned the language around writing from TFABB (Mary p. 7)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• S</li> <li>• 10</li> <li>• pri</li> <li>• rig</li> <li>•</li> <li>• ce</li> <li>•</li> <li>• i</li> <li>• the</li> </ul>
text ature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• situated learning p. 9 - Mary</li> <li>• "because they explain things the way I can understand it" (p. 6)</li> <li>• "learn from peers (Olivia p. 2) - how do the same for new teachers</li> <li>• "from personal experience" (Juan p. 7) - learn by <u>doing</u> - (Mary p. 2)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• S</li> <li>• 10</li> <li>• pri</li> <li>• rig</li> <li>•</li> <li>• ce</li> <li>•</li> <li>• i</li> <li>• the</li> </ul>
learning, individuals asks these	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- learn by teaching (Nalla p. 3) - situated cognition</li> <li>- "trial + error" (Olivia - p. 1)</li> <li>- TFABB workshop (Anne p. 3) "we had to read, plan, talk... very interactive"</li> <li>- grade wide meetings (Claver School) Anne p. 4 ... plan together</li> <li>- sharing activities + samples of student work at in-services (Nalla p. 3) (Anne p. 5)</li> <li>- discussing/sharing w/ family members</li> <li>- "every 2<sup>nd</sup> thus we have a meeting in our school...." (Diego p. 4)</li> <li>- work with a partner to present a "model lesson" - "learn by doing" (Nalla p. 3)</li> <li>- "by teaching the strategy to my peers I learned it better + was able to take it back to the classroom" (Simon p. 6) + p. 9</li> <li>- facilitating workshop sessions (Simon p. 6)</li> <li>- mentorship (Juan p. 3) principal mentor - (Dora p. 2)</li> <li>- sharing ideas w/ colleagues at UB (Juan p. 3)</li> <li>- "I learn by working in groups w/ my peers" (Dora p. 3)</li> <li>- interaction at in-services (Olivia p. 6)</li> <li>- TFABB - we learn from you + you learn from us (Mary p. 7)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• S</li> <li>• 10</li> <li>• pri</li> <li>• rig</li> <li>•</li> <li>• ce</li> <li>•</li> <li>• i</li> <li>• the</li> </ul>
pace,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "it's important to know your surroundings and the culture in which you teach" (Diego p. 5)</li> <li>• "I chose teaching so I could help the people in my village... with my contributions I think I can help make our country more developed"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• S</li> <li>• 10</li> <li>• pri</li> <li>• rig</li> <li>•</li> <li>• ce</li> <li>•</li> <li>• i</li> <li>• the</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "It's one thing to tell us how to do something, but to show us is much better... that's how I learn" (Diego - p. 3)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• S</li> <li>• 10</li> <li>• pri</li> <li>• rig</li> <li>•</li> <li>• ce</li> <li>•</li> <li>• i</li> <li>• the</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I learn by working in groups w/ my peers" (Dora p. 3)</li> <li>• interaction at in-services (Olivia p. 6)</li> <li>• TFABB - we learn from you + you learn from us (Mary p. 7)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• S</li> <li>• 10</li> <li>• pri</li> <li>• rig</li> <li>•</li> <li>• ce</li> <li>•</li> <li>• i</li> <li>• the</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I chose teaching so I could help the people in my village... with my contributions I think I can help make our country more developed"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• S</li> <li>• 10</li> <li>• pri</li> <li>• rig</li> <li>•</li> <li>• ce</li> <li>•</li> <li>• i</li> <li>• the</li> </ul>

Figure 7 Sample from chart used to organize data related to learning theories

### ***Representation of Data***

Examining the culture of education in Toledo, I was reminded that I was but one person interpreting and representing the lived reality of several different primary school teachers. Van Maanen (1988) states that “ethnography carries quite serious intellectual and moral responsibilities, for the images of others inscribed in writing are most assuredly not neutral” (p.1). In the author evacuated realist tales, I attempted to provide pure and authentic data focused solely on the teachers’ experiences by including detailed quotes from local teachers involved in this study. The interjection of confessional tales then allowed me to personally respond to the realist tales. The use of ethnographic fiction was also added to provide an overview of the career trajectory of a typical primary school teacher in Toledo while at the same time allowing local teachers to experience some degree of verisimilitude.

### ***Realist Tales***

Realist ontology involves the contention that the real world makes a difference in the study as well as the participants in the study. The realist tale is a form of data representation that focuses on the participant’s point of view. This is done by weaving extensive closely edited quotes into the written text (Van Maanen, 1988), providing the reader with a strong sense of the participants’ voices. A large section of research findings in this study is represented in this way. It is here that the reader will become familiar with the lay of the land in terms of the development of teacher knowledge in the district of Toledo, supported by first hand accounts and experiences of the local teachers. As is paramount in a realist tale, I have removed myself from this section of the findings in an attempt to allow the participants to speak for themselves. This section describes how the

teacher education system operates in Toledo and how teachers engage in professional development. Themes covered in this section focus on teaching being a family profession, the influence of religion on teaching and teachers' professional development, the hierarchies that exist in the district as well as the lingering effects of colonialism on a newly independent nation.

Fine (1999) supports this type of representation and presents three justifications for its use and effectiveness: the intersubjective, epistemological and pragmatic. Firstly, he claims that although a set of truths cannot be definitive, the realist accounts provide evidence that is good enough (in intersubjective terms) for understanding a world. He suggests that if two ethnographers visited the same scene, they would leave with two different pictures; yet the pictures they perceived would be recognizable by each other. One of the features of the realist tale is that it makes sense to the readers and to the participants of the scenes describes. This is a critical component to this study as I have various intended audiences, all of whom I wish to reach at some level. Secondly, Fine suggests that the legitimacy of the realist tale is based on the recognition that the way that researchers come to learn about the world is precisely how the participants in a study come to learn about their social world. I found this to be true in this study as I observed the participants as they searched for meaning to the questions, by digging into their history and experience as teachers and more importantly, as people. Finally, Fine stresses the fact that realist tales are indeed useful or pragmatic. The personal accounts allow the reader to build knowledge about the social world. "There can be little doubt, even among the critics of the realist approach, that some of the classic naturalistic ethnographies have

produced startling, compelling and practical results that have demonstrated their worth” (Fine, 1999, p. 538).

### *Confessional Tales*

Findings represented in confessional tales, where the researcher’s point of view is emphasized, are woven throughout the realist tales. Atkinson (1991) suggests that it is not an alternative genre; rather it exists in a complementary rather than contrasting relation with realist tales. Sparkes (2002) agrees, stating that

Confessional tales tend to exist in a symbiotic relationship to the realist tales told about the same research. ...they do not replace realist accounts, but stand beside them by elaborating extensively on the formal elements of the methodology and saying what is unsayable in the realist telling. (p. 61)

The personal voice in the confessional tale helps build an intimacy with the reader, as personal biases, character flaws, anxieties and vulnerabilities of the researcher are identified and discussed. As Sparkes (2002) suggests, the author is rarely portrayed as a passive actor in a confessional tale, but rather an active agent. My position in the research was elaborated on in the confessional tales, as I struggled with a variety of notions, including objectivity in a situation and location where I felt, and still feel, so at home. Gans (1999) cautions researchers to become friends with the participants only after the study is complete, suggesting that if the researchers fail to distance themselves from the people they are studying, “the rules of qualitative reliability and validity are sidestepped, reducing the likelihood that sociologists and their work will be trusted by their readers” ( p. 542). My struggle in attempting to stay true to the values of

ethnography as well as helping my “friends” understand their reality is present in the confessional tales.

### *Fictional Tales*

A small yet potentially powerful section of data findings is represented as fictional ethnography. Although the short story opening the following chapter is fiction, it is based on facts – events that actually happened. The majority of these facts were collected in the summer of 2007 as part of in-depth interviews. Facts, events and identities are sometimes rearranged in an attempt to draw the reader into such stories in a way that enables deeper understandings of individuals, organizations or the events themselves (Tierney, 1993).

Writers of this genre hold the epistemological stance that knowledge is not static, but rather fluid and co-created by the reader as he or she interprets the text. Good ethnographic fiction creates spaces to allow readers to participate in the imaginative construction of literary reality, giving the readers the opportunity to interpret the meaning as they wish (Sparkes, 2002). Rinehart (1998) suggests that a key aim of this genre is to get at both the affective feel of the experience and the cognitive “truth”. Truth in this type of writing is not a realist narrative but rather a sensual, subtle, magical, lyrical, visceral truth (Rinehart, 1998). The author’s ultimate goal is to allow the reader to experience verisimilitude.

I chose this genre for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is my intended audience. I wish to reach my readers at an immediate and emotional level. I intend to present this research to some of the educational leaders in the district as well as the country, in hopes that they too will gain a deeper understanding of the opportunities and

challenges surrounding the professional development of primary school teachers. As Sparkes (2002) suggests, I want to inform, awaken and possibly disturb my audience.

Writers using this genre attempt to bring the reader right “into” the situation. They count on the audience being able to relate to the stories, see themselves or those they know, represented in the text and perhaps even go so far as to “buy into” the concepts presented. Sparkes (2002) refers to this as “emancipatory educational story sharing” where the reader becomes empowered to take action in creating change. Such tales have an impact on how people see themselves, how others see them and how they act toward each other. This potential to reach people on a humanistic and emotional level is a key ingredient often necessary to create change in the world.

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) identify educational research as the construction and reconstruction of personal stories - that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. To some extent, all research writing is crafted, constructed, fashioned, composed and invented (Sparkes, 2002). Fictional representation however, grants the author much in the way of creative license. It has the ability to do what no other expression can do by evoking the emotion of a felt experience and portraying the values, pathos, grandeur and spirituality of the human condition (Banks & Banks, 1998).

Oral language and story telling has always been a powerful means to express traditions and ways of knowing – passed down from one generation to the next. Based on feedback from my pilot study (where this piece of fiction originated), I feel this is a suitable means of representation for people in this community and country. As one of the interviewees from my pilot study suggested, “Stories can be very powerful as people can

really relate to them. Plus, everybody likes to hear a story” (O. Woodye, personal communication, August 18, 2006). Because my intended audience members could come from a variety of language backgrounds, I steered clear of any academic jargon that might detract from the meaning or flow of the story. As the most important step in this research process is to share the information and realities with key stakeholders, it is my hope that the data represented in this genre is accessible and meaningful to all Belizeans in the field of education.

## Chapter 4 – Results and Interpretation of Data

In this chapter multiple representational techniques have been employed to interpret the data. The first section “Maria’s Journey” is written as fictional ethnography. Construction of the story was based on accounts provided by 20 different educators in Toledo. It is hoped that all Belizean educators reading this story will be able to recognize themselves somewhere in the story, experiencing some degree of verisimilitude and that readers from outside Belize can gain an overview of a teacher’s journey in Belize. Realist tales and confessional tales are interwoven throughout the remainder of the chapter; realist in regular text and confessional in italics. Van Maanen (1988) recognizes that these two representations contrast each other but are commonly combined in ethnographic research as a complementary pair. He explains realist tales as being author-evacuated, where data is cleanly separated from the fieldworker. In other words, the author uses detailed quotes from the participants to narrate the story as objectively as possible in a “dispassionate third person voice” (Van Maanen, 1988, p.45). Confessional tales, on the other hand, provide opportunities for the author to reflect on the research and express highly personalized accounts of the realist tales. In this dissertation I have employed confession tales in three different ways: to critique the research process including methodology and ethical issues, to reflect on the realist tales as they pertain to my own learning and teaching practice, and to discuss things I might have done differently throughout the process.

Following the story, emphasis on early themes is characterized by realist tales, with minimal use of confessional tales. It was my intent to give the reader a “lay of the land” in terms of the lived reality of the Toledo teacher. I recognized, however, that it

was only my interpretation of their reality, as a culture is expressed by the actions and words of its members, then *interpreted*, not *given to*, the ethnographer (Van Maanen, 1988). Representation in the form of confessional tales increased as the chapter progressed as I began to weave myself into the research process, writing more acutely through my own personal lens. I fully acknowledge, accept and appreciate there will be as many interpretations of this work as there are readers but trust that all will connect in their own way and be inspired to enrich their own educational communities.

### **Maria's Journey**

*Gently sliding off her sandals, she takes a deep breath as the last of her students skips out the door. The 88 degree day has been full of challenges – a typical day for a teacher in Toledo. Tilting her head to the sky, she slowly closes her eyes. She is thankful she is just minutes from her home and family as she now lives and works in the coastal town of Punta Gorda. She takes time to gaze out at the Caribbean Sea, feels the breeze on her shoulders and ponders her career, her community and the role she plays in their interaction. She has touched many lives and is proud to call herself a teacher.*

Maria's journey began when she was just a primary school student herself. Her parents were both teachers as was her aunt. It was a respected career choice providing steady employment as there was never a shortage of students in schools. She watched some of her friends' parents move from one job to the next – in the rice fields or at the fish market – struggling to make ends meet, and knew she had made a wise choice. She finished high school and quickly slid into a teaching position without any official training or preparation. Although she was born and raised in Punta Gorda Town, her first assignment took her to where most teachers began their careers – a remote village at the head of a multigrade class. She would not dream of

complaining about such an assignment as she learned long ago that the management team viewed compliance as an asset of any teacher.

Maria soon discovered that most of her students spoke very little English, even though it was the national language and language of instruction in all schools. She worked hard with her students and in time, they were able to pick up some English. She was convinced this was time well spent even though many would fall behind in core curriculum areas and be forced to repeat the grade. Communication with parents was next to impossible for her. With her first year of teaching behind her, Maria enjoyed her summer break and celebrated her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Maria cared about her students and it showed. She eventually tired of the daily three hour round trip bumpy bus ride to work, on dirt roads scattered with rain filled potholes, and relocated to the village itself. She reasoned that this was time she could be spending planning lessons or working with her students after school. One day she would take night classes at the University of Belize increasing both her qualifications and pay, but that day would have to wait. Her students needed her now. She had found her calling and was known now as Teacher Maria.

Village life was challenging. Despite the central government's promise to provide electricity to every village in the country, Maria's was still without running water or electricity. Villagers collected 'sky juice' during the rainy season for drinking and bathed and washed clothes in the nearby river. She quickly adapted, learning how to avoid the botfly, scorpions and of course, the dreaded yellow-jaw.

It wasn't long before Maria was promoted to a teaching principal and was moved to another village; closer to Punta Gorda Town, but still remote. Her new position was nothing short of overwhelming as she was pulled in all directions. She was aware of the fact that she was a role model to all

villagers as she was educated and highly respected. Her teachers were young and looked to her for guidance. Her students were keen to learn which motivated her to improve the physical setting of her school. Although it had a roof and walls, the school lacked basic furniture as well as school supplies for the students. She wrote letters to the government as well as small businesses in Punta Gorda. Eventually she raised enough money so that all students in her school had a chair to sit on. Soon a small local organization began funding two meals a week for the students in her school, as many children arrived each day with empty stomachs. Occasionally she was actually glad to be free of electricity or water, as she would have to find ways to pay the utility bills herself. As a principal, the village expected a lot from Maria.

Maria worked tirelessly with her teachers and considered them more than just colleagues. They were her friends. She often worked with Mr. Celma who was attempting to teach his students to multiply fractions, yet struggled with basic math concepts himself. She secretly smiled inside when she learned Mr. Mirez was teaching his Standard IV students how to raise chickens instead of practice geometry. She felt helpless when she learned that Ms. Antonio, pregnant and unwed, was to be relocated to the most remote village in the district to pay for her sins. She wondered how Miss Smith, a Peace Corps worker, was getting along with the villagers and how on earth her work could lead to anything sustainable in this remote part of the world. She felt exhausted when she thought of Mr. Paz who rode his bicycle five hours at the end of the week to return to his home village to be with his family.

Sundays after church was group-planning time and nobody protested – not even Mr. Paz who rode his bicycle back early Sunday morning. The only exception to the Sunday sessions was the one weekend a month where they all hopped on the bus traveling to Punta Gorda to collect and cash their pay cheques, buy much needed food and supplies and visit family and friends. They were careful not to miss that bus, as it could take a full day to reach

Punta Gorda hitchhiking. Sunday planning sessions provided the time and space for much teacher learning where the conversation often centered around previous summer workshops.

Maria and her teachers loved summer workshops and thoroughly enjoyed the interaction and professional discussion with colleagues. Maria helped her teachers understand how they could implement the new ideas into their own classes. She collected small stones and bottle caps, showing their use in simple math lessons. She used empty coke bottles to explain the metric system. She collected story books from anywhere she could.

The decision to move back to Punta Gorda was not an easy one. She had come to understand and appreciate village life and knew she was making a positive impact. She was also aware, however, that living in Punta Gorda would provide more opportunities for her own children as well as allow them to be closer to their relatives. Maria continued to work hard and inspire children in her new school – but she never forgot about the children and teachers in the villages. She continued to explore ways to create resources, educate teachers and make education more accessible to all students.

*She takes a final glance out the window and wonders if the fish in the sea slow down when they become worn out. The years of work and sacrifice lay across her forehead and fall deep in her eyes. Although she feels like it is time to retire, she pushes on. Her eyes shift and fixate proudly on the official teaching certificate now posted on her wall – her lips soften into a smile. She is tired but content. She continues to contemplate. She breathes knowing the children in the villages are feeling the same wind on their faces. She continues her quest deep in the tiny country of Belize - full of diverse land, culture and people. The land of Toledo.*

## **The Toledo Teacher: Insights from Maria**

The lived experiences of several primary school teachers in Toledo are merged as “Maria”. Maria is Belizean, but she is also Garifuna, Creole, Mestizo, East Indian and Mayan. She speaks multiple languages and has friends and colleagues of many different ethnic backgrounds. She is male, female, young and old. She is as much different as she is the same. She lives and works in the most remote and isolated region in the country. She was born and raised in Toledo and has ventured very little outside the tiny, majority world country of Belize.

Maria comes from a long line of teachers and is a respected member of her society. She is a product of a colonial driven education system, emphasizing teacher authority and student suppression. She has less formal education than any practicing teacher in the nation and faces many challenges in her attempt to deliver quality and relevant education to the students placed in her care. She is dedicated, hard working, resourceful and for the most part, complacent. She has an innate understanding of the system in which she works and is careful not to ‘rock the boat’ or upset the status quo.

Maria, like the country of Belize itself, is continually redefining herself as she negotiates her way through newly acquired freedom. It is not surprising that Maria struggles to realize this independence in a country that has been free of colonial rule for less than 30 years. The following sub-sections are included to provide a more detailed description for the reader, in the hopes that he or she will gain a deeper understanding of the Toledo teacher. Cultural ethnicity, socio-economic status, prior life experiences as well as profession lives, all play significant roles in the journey teachers take as educators

in Toledo as they work toward a heightened awareness of the learning and teaching process.

### *Cultural Ethnicity*

Several different ethnic backgrounds are represented by the Toledo teacher. The Garifuna, who settled in Punta Gorda in 1802, dominated the teaching profession in the district for many years. Despite the fact that most of them were from Punta Gorda Town and spoke their own language, they held teaching positions throughout a district where most of their students spoke a different language. As other ethnic groups migrated into the area, they slowly made their presence felt in the teaching community. In the past 20 years there has been an increase in Creole, East Indian and Mayan teachers, creating more balance in teacher demographics. Specifically, the opening of a second high school outside of Punta Gorda Town in 2001 has provided the opportunity for more Mayans to complete high school, as they have traditionally lived in more rural communities. In fact the Mayans, who were the first to inhabit the land of Toledo, now constitute the majority of the teaching population in the district.

As the district is home to so many different ethnic groups, it is common for teachers not only to celebrate their own culture and traditions, but also to celebrate those of other ethnic groups as well. This practice carries over into teachers' classrooms across the district, in an attempt to preserve cultural heritages and promote peace among ethnic groups. Woodbury Haug (1998) however, states that her work in Punta Gorda Town revealed that although the curriculum mandates all students are to learn about the different ethnic groups living in the district, teachers are inclined to teach the children more about their own ethnic group. Her argument centers around the fact that it is

common for primary school teachers to teach content areas they are familiar with and ethnic groups are no different than other curriculum areas. In addition, the national curriculum lists various ethnic groups to be studied, but does not include a “mixed” category, a category that has been steadily increasing. Teachers, as well as administrators often neglect to include children of mixed heritage as having their own status that is separate from others, leading to confusion for students when choosing an ethnic group to attach themselves to (Woodbury Haug, 1998).

### *Socio-economic Status*

Teachers in Toledo today are almost all high school graduates and affluent members of their social community. Successfully completing a high school program equates to being “educated” in Toledo. It is then expected that you gain employment in an area other than manual labour. Belizean males identify three main career choices for high school graduates: a policeman, a soldier or a teacher. Belizean females describe teaching and nursing as formidable choices for “educated” ladies.

I decided I was going to be a teacher or a nurse, but I didn’t want to deliver babies, so I decided on teaching and became a teacher at the age of 17. I became a teacher by choice. (Mary)

Although the salary of a teacher in Toledo varies depending on formal qualifications, even beginning teachers make sufficient money to live above the line of poverty. They receive steady pay over the year and rarely, if ever, find themselves out of work.

Teachers are highly revered, especially in small villages. When assigned to a village to teach, they instantly become an important member of a very small community. They are often the most educated and respected people in the village, and are asked to

lead new construction projects, help with fundraising, counsel families or be godparents to newborns. Some are even ordained ministers and marry couples in the village.

Teachers are nothing less than role models in rural Toledo and in most cases rise to the challenge. For instance, Diego felt it was necessary to adjust some of his own personal practices if he was to become a successful role model and effective teacher in his small village community.

I also had to adapt to teaching myself. I was a bit of a rough guy and now all of a sudden I am a role model – this lifestyle was different for me. I had to change the language I used. These were all challenging factors for me. (Diego)

Immersion in village life provides insight for teachers, adding to their professional repertoire. Seeing their students and their families outside of school on a regular basis, helps them to gain a deeper understanding about the ways in which the different families and ethnic groups organize themselves to live, work and learn. Specifically, such immersion in village life helps teachers learn about their students' culture and language, which can ultimately aid them in their daily teaching practice. The process of learning for these teachers is not isolated within the individual but involves contact with the social and cultural environment. Putnam and Borko claim (as cited in Wilson & Berne, 1999) that interaction among members of communities influences not only what is validated as knowledge, but also shapes the very way a person thinks or reasons. Such learning is social in nature and is facilitated through discourse and interaction with others.

### ***Prior Life Experiences***

Toledo teachers have rich previous life experiences and bring much to the proverbial teaching table. Cultural, societal and political experiences help to shape their

world views and determine who they become as educators. Each individual is a part of community where cooperation and respect are paramount for survival. People know their family and neighbours well, especially in rural villages. Without radios, telephones or televisions, people work the land or socialize with one another to pass the time. Children are raised as part of large extended families, in constant support of each other. They spend many years looking after younger siblings or cousins and learn from a very young age how to care for another human being.

Teachers in Toledo are most often members of large extended families and often come from a lineage of teachers. With limited steady and well paying jobs in the district, high school graduates are inclined to join the profession when other family members have done the same. Children from such families gain perceptions early on about the intimate role of a teacher's life. In fact, teachers consider family members as influential mentors on their journey to becoming teachers.

When I told my grandfather that I was interested in nursing, he suggested that I stick to the family tradition. He pointed out the advantages and disadvantages to being a teacher, so I listened to him. (Olivia)

When considering prior life experiences of these teachers, it is also necessary to look at the cumulative experience of their school life; specifically teachers when they were students themselves. This is especially significant in this part of the world, as most teachers will draw on their years of compulsory schooling to help them understand the role of a teacher, rather than rely on pre-service teacher education. In fact, like most high school graduates world wide, Belizean students will have spent over 35,000 hours watching a teacher – making it, as previously stated by Britzman (1986), one of the most

socially familiar professions in the world. Although this knowledge about teaching is socially constructed in the minds of people, it remains an influential factor that comes into play when learning to teach. Several participants in this research support this point including Simon.

I had to look back and recall what my own teachers had done when I was a student in primary school. I worked as teachers used to work. (Simon)

If teachers begin teaching as they were taught, then the teachers of Toledo have a structured colonial model to look to. Some described their lives as students as somewhat intimidating as they were rarely encouraged to speak or ask questions, but rather listen to the teacher. Many of them took this knowledge of both learning and teaching and applied it to their early teaching practice. After all, they were successful in a system such as this, so it would seem like a good place to start. This very rote system which involved much memorization and copying from a black board provided a safe and secure way to launch a teaching career in Toledo. Olivia found herself doing just that as she began to teach.

I used to do things the old way – the same way that I was taught as a student. I would sit there and listen to my teacher talk all day. I thought that was the ideal way to teach so that is the way I started to teach. The teacher would just stand there and give instructions and then walk around. (Olivia)

Teachers in this study readily admit that as novice educators, they began teaching in such a way, based predominately on the fact that they were taught that way. Another teacher describes the oppressive nature in which she was taught a a student.

This rote type of learning was one of the failures the colonial system left us here. I was taught that way. The teacher was almost like a superior being in the

classroom. You sit and listen. You do not ask questions. Only the teacher could ask questions and if you didn't respond you were punished. All our values looked down on who we were and what our cultural identity was. (Mary)

These teachers are products of more than just a colonial system of education where rote learning and teacher-centered classrooms were commonplace. They are products, as we all are, of a global system of education that directly identifies those with power and those without. Britzman (1986) explains that education and educational ideology are one, promoting particular images of power, knowledge and values by rewarding particular forms of individual and institutional behaviour. This mindset is perpetuated by the new teacher, propelling the cultural reproduction of authoritarian teaching practices.

### *Professional Life*

Teachers in Toledo begin teaching at a very young age. Six of the eight teachers interviewed were only teenagers when they began to teach. In most cases these teachers arrived straight out of high school with no previously acquired pedagogical knowledge, practice teaching, or assigned mentors and were left to their own devices to learn to teach. With the exception of one teacher in this study, participants explained that the lack of formal preparation affected their level of confidence when they stood in front of a class for the very first time. Juan admits as much, stating, "I did not want my students to think that I was not qualified, so I put on a 'face' that showed that I was ready, even if I wasn't." (Juan)

Interviewees were quick to point out that they learned to teach by teaching. Classroom teaching experience in fact was, and is, the common denominator in learning to teach for almost all teachers in the district. Their professional knowledge is developed

predominantly from trial and error and reflection on their practice. They rely heavily on personal practical knowledge to survive in an already most challenging classroom situation. At various points in their career, teachers begin to seek out alternative methods of professional development including formal schooling and district workshops. Nalla, for example, felt that she had the necessary content knowledge to work with her students, but lacked the pedagogical knowledge to teach the concepts in a successful manner. She discussed the need for a variety of teaching strategies to use for different children in her class, depending on their academic level, behaviour and motivation. Nalla sought out this information in college classes as well as TFABB workshops.

Initial teaching assignments often take new teachers away from their family and friends, to remote and very rural communities. They may move around to different villages during the course of their career, but more often than not, will eventually return to their home village to teach. Teaching in remote areas presents challenges, even for those teachers born and raised in such communities. Despite living in Toledo his whole life, Juan did not even recognize the name of the village he was to start his career in.

When I first started teaching there were a lot of things that were going on in my mind. I was in a very remote area. The first time I went out to the village, the river had flooded and the bus stopped at the first river – Blue Creek. I had to walk the rest of the way with all my luggage and I could not take it all. I was very disappointed that nobody told me that I was going to be walking through mud, crossing rivers on foot, or going to the bathroom in the bush. When they told me the name of the village I was going to be working in, I asked the

management if that was the name of a village in Toledo, because I had never heard of it. (Juan)

With multi-grade classrooms and limited supplies and materials, teachers are very resourceful. They borrow teaching resources from each other and save classroom materials from year to year. Some learn new languages in order to teach the students in their classes. Others fundraise in order to provide all students in their classes with pens, pencils and paper.

The teacher of Toledo finds herself in the majority world-wide. She is an uncertified, yet perhaps qualified teacher, struggling to provide suitable education to the children in her care. She accepts the daunting task most often with pride and grace. She consciously defers her own formal learning as she faces a plethora of challenges in her teaching day. Ironically, and perhaps unbeknownst to her, it is the manner in which she deals with the challenges that makes her the capable learner that she has become. Challenges are merely opportunities in which she begins to transform the system in which she works, to better educate herself, her colleagues and ultimately, students in Toledo. Her most momentous and mammoth challenge, however, is to shake an ideology that has been present for generations, displayed in a “system that governs teachers and students by secretly practicing the enforcement of The Culture of Silence”. (Mary)

The following four sections illustrate salient themes emerging from the research. As previously identified, a theme is essentially an assumption of a culture based on the observations that certain actions, or ways of being, repeat themselves over and over in that culture. The following themes are what I interpreted as being key assumptions of this culture, as they pertained to the research inquiry. As a reminder, the two questions

guiding this research inquiry were: 1. *How does the development of teachers' professional knowledge occur in the rural communities of the majority world country of Belize?* 2. *What kind of impact has the Literacy Coaches Program had on the development of teachers' knowledge in Toledo, Belize?*

### **This is How We Do Things Here**

As the heading implies, there is a set way of operating within the educational world in Toledo, Belize. Few would argue that rules and regulations governing education systems are necessary to organize students and teachers to work effectively and that an authoritative body should work to ensure that practices and principles are in place. A significant issue in Toledo, however, concerns the possession, degree and use of this control. Teachers in this study describe these watchful eyes as creating a certain degree of tension and uneasiness in the supervisory process. Conformity and obedience are encouraged over creativity and growth. Participants claim this has led to teachers who lack confidence and are stifled in their practice, often growing complacent in their jobs. The very real consequences for those who fail to “walk the line” leads to teachers who resist taking professional risks, fearing the ramifications of their actions. All these factors have a significant impact on teacher learning in the district. Notions of such oppression are displayed in many of the participant quotes in this section.

Belize has a history of being organized and administered by those other than its own. From its very early existence, non-natives have inhabited land, logged trees, formed communities and established governments and schools. In 1954 the United Kingdom did give up some control of Belize, establishing a new constitution providing for the internal self-government of the colony. The election of Belize's first Prime Minister George

Price, however, came with some ties. A governing body would remain in Jamaica to oversee things, in case the country had difficulty ruling itself. In addition, it was a foreigner, B. H. Easter, who sailed from Jamaica, to complete an evaluation of Belize's education system in 1935. To this day, a small contingent of British soldiers remains in place near Belize City, in the event that Guatemala may decide to make yet another attempt at claiming a portion of land near the border. It could be argued that this history of outside administration has helped to create a nation that is used to being provided for, which in turn has produced citizens that lack confidence and are somewhat disempowered.

All but one participant in this study alluded to an external force that has in some way had a negative impact on their career as a teacher. One teacher explained that just when he thought he was doing a good job, one of his superiors released him from a principalship and reassigned him to general classroom teacher duties, with no explanation offered. Teachers explained that when teachers are successful they are sometimes considered a threat to colleagues or management. Based on these accounts of such oppressive forces, one can conclude that there is little job security and that the desire to improve and better oneself is somewhat diminished. Juan feels that in the teaching profession there is not much collegiality or support when it comes to taking risks and speaking out and that teacher morale is low.

Here in Belize, people do not encourage you if you are doing well. If you are starting to rise up, then people (teachers and/or principals) just want to bring you down. There is just a lot of jealousy here in Belize. A lot of teachers are afraid to tell the truth and speak out about this. Perhaps they are afraid to lose their jobs.

It's hard for others to encourage you. It's the way we are brought up in Belize.

(Juan)

Juan's experience is not unique in Toledo. Almost all of the interviews conducted for this study, as well as the pilot study, had a similar tone. Instead of supporting each other, most of the interviewees were very quick to point out faults not only with management, but of their fellow colleagues as well. Many indicated that although they were confident their own teaching practices were sound, they questioned the practices of others. In addition, interviewees agreed that there were some people in the profession who were highly unmotivated and merely going through the motions in order to receive a pay cheque at the end of the month. Some participants even went so far as to question the honesty and integrity of some of their colleagues in the district.

*I surmised that teacher morale in Toledo was low. I also thought that the opportunity I had given them to speak may have been quite novel for them – it may very well have been one of the first times anyone had ever asked them for their opinion about their profession and the challenges they face. Although all interview discussions began slow and smooth, by the end most teachers were up on the proverbial “soap box” revealing issues that had plagued them since the dawn of their career. Although this made me feel uncomfortable at times, I felt it was important for them to know that somebody valued what they had to say and was willing to listen.*

***Religion: “There is still a form of colonialism”***

Religion, specifically the Catholic Church, is a significant factor affecting the career trajectory of teachers in Toledo. As stated earlier in this dissertation, almost 80% of the primary schools in the country are managed by the Catholic Church and the

percentages are the same for the district of Toledo. The Catholic management is responsible for the deployment of teachers to all Catholic schools in the district. Because there is still no formal application process to hire teachers, the management is free to choose whomever they wish for teaching assignments, leading potentially to highly subjective placements. Although district leaders have recently emphasized the importance of pre-service education for their teachers, only 3 of 24 teachers hired in September of 2008 had anything resembling formal teacher education (C. Lopez, personal communication, November, 2008). A teacher in this study claimed that the Catholic Church management hires teachers because they attend church regularly, not necessarily because they are qualified to teach. This claim is supported by Woodbury Haug (1998) who suggests that the hiring of teachers in Toledo is based on the potential teacher's religious affiliation. It is possible to infer that an educational system operating in this manner may indeed exhibit a low level of teacher morale. It could be argued that low teacher morale equates to low teacher motivation in terms of professional growth and learning.

Catholic Church school management was a major point of discussion with all participants in this study. Most, in fact, provided scathing criticisms of the management system, with two actually leaving the system altogether. One teacher described the management sending her to a remote village school because she became pregnant before she was married. Another teacher was living with his girlfriend but did not intend to marry her in the near future. The management notified him he had one month to marry her or he would lose his job. He was tired of the Church controlling his personal life as well as his professional life, so moved to a government school.

Another participant in this study referred to this type of control as a form of colonialism.

I believe that even though we are no longer under the British system, there is still a form of colonialism, through the Catholic Church management. I think that they teach us how to oppress people. Sometimes you feel guilty to say what you think – they make you think that it is a sin to say what you think or to question things. They want us to teach religion, but they want us to have the students memorize prayers instead of praying from the heart. (Mary)

One interviewee shared a story about a close colleague and mentor of hers. He was an experienced teacher taking part in a national educational initiative aimed at improving primary education for students by making the curriculum more relevant to students and families. The Rural Education and Agriculture Program (REAP) was initiated in 1976 to create the attitudes and necessary skills for rural youths to make meaningful contributions to the country's agricultural development (Jennings & Edmond, 1986). As learning experiences for his students, he raised livestock and grew vegetables outside the classroom. Although the children loved the project and worked very hard at it, they were not permitted to keep any of the vegetables at the end of the project. The Catholic Church ultimately had complete control over where the vegetables were to go, even though the children and teachers did all the work to grow them. The teacher was then transferred to a more remote school, presumably because of the suggestion that the children take a share of the crops.

In Toledo, as with all districts in the country, The District Education Officer is charged with the task of managing the overall education system in the district.

Specifically, he or she manages the government schools and oversees the management of the religious schools. Teachers in this study, however, perceived the manager of the Catholic schools as having equal, and in some cases more, power over teacher issues than the District Education Officer. One can speculate that this was because six of the eight participants worked in a Catholic school. This number is fairly representative of teacher demographics in the district as nearly 200 of Toledo's 278 primary school teachers work in Catholic schools.

*Listening to the teachers speak about the influence of the Catholic Church was more than I expected and made for uneasy discussion. Although I was aware of the general management style of the Catholic Church, I did not realize the extent to which the teachers felt manipulated and oppressed. The more I learned about the issue, the more I realized I didn't know and so couldn't help but ask. At times I felt as if the conversation moved away from our focus of teacher learning, to some place more sensitive and personal. In fact, I thought carefully about including this section at all, as I knew that it had the potential to disturb some people – the same people who had been so gracious in allowing me to conduct research in their school district.*

*I believe my situation was somewhat unique to other ethnographers, who, as Van Maanen (1988) explains, usually arrive in their surroundings with little introduction to the area or the people. I developed friendships over the years and had become, what I perceived to be, a trusted colleague among those in the educational community of Toledo. When writing about this issue I found that I walked a fine line between reporting accurate research and being loyal to the educational leaders in the district. In the end, I was reminded that I was to interpret the lived reality of my participants and if this was*

*their lived reality, then I would have to report it. I was satisfied that my interpretation of the teachers' stories was honest and would be respected, if not happily accepted, by my colleagues in Toledo.*

***Hierarchies: "The least qualified teachers were normally stuck to the back"***

Despite the fact that the Catholic Church management team has much control over the management of its teachers, there are other general hierarchies that do exist throughout the district. The deployment of teachers in Toledo operates very similarly to many regions in the world. Beginning teachers are often placed in remote villages with many challenges including harsh living conditions as well as lack of materials and supplies for learning and teaching. As earlier described, despite the fact that students in the rural schools in the country do worse on national exams than other students, inexperienced teachers continue to be placed in these rural areas (SPEAR, 1991). Once these teachers have gained some teaching experience, they are sometimes able to relocate to a school closer to Punta Gorda Town, if they wish. More experienced teachers with a certain degree of seniority are more or less able to choose where they want to work. If management suggests that they teach in a remote village, they can turn it down and request another school.

The least qualified teachers were normally stuck to the back. Those who were trained had more of an option. They had the right to say, "I don't want to go back to that village. If you don't want to hire me, I can go elsewhere". So, more experienced and qualified teachers had some control over where they were going to be placed.....it is tough for teacher in those places (remote villages) though. A month at a time is very challenging. (Simon)

Simon's description of being "stuck to the back" refers to areas outside of the main town of Punta Gorda. Similar comments were made by other participants in this study as they described the earlier part of their career in rural villages. Most of the teachers I spoke with agreed that you had to "put in your time" in rural Toledo before possibly moving to an area of your choice.

*This practice is not unique to this region of the world. My personal journey to initial employment didn't just take me outside of Victoria, as was the case with many of my classmates, but clear out of the country. My original reaction of much excitement upon learning I would be teaching in southern California was severely weakened upon my arrival in the dusty town in the middle of the Mojave Desert. The superintendent motioned to a dirt pile and informed me that my school was "being wheeled in" in a few days. I suddenly realized why I had obtained this assignment with relative ease.*

*Things in Littlerock were rough in the beginning. Although the double wide trailers that we taught in arrived in time, they were not set up properly for the first day. We had to wait for electricity hook ups and regular teaching supplies as well. In my first year I had six students who spoke little English (their first language was Spanish), three seasoned shoplifters, two physically abused children and a boy who lived in a car with his dad – all in my grade three class just 45 minutes north east of Los Angeles.*

*Following my initial teaching assignment in California I worked in rural communities on Vancouver Island before landing a position in the prestigious Victoria School District. It wasn't pretty though, as I spent the next three years teaching in one of the roughest and most transient areas of the capital city. I felt like I had been "stuck to the back" just as Simon had described.*

A second form of hierarchy that exists in Toledo revolves around the professionalization or certification of teachers. Despite the fact that teachers have been teaching for years in the region with little if any formal education past high school, there has been a push in recent times for teachers to complete some level of certification. Teachers explained that it was not so much what you knew, but the fact that you had that piece of paper showing that you knew what you knew. The quote below from one of my participants illustrates this point well.

We have become a society of “institutions”. It does not matter how much you know, if there is no piece of paper from an institution saying that you know what you know, then you are just a common person. There needs to be the name of an institution behind that knowledge, when in fact, often times the person without the formal training may know more useful information. Someone with a degree is someone to be looked up to. (Simon)

From participants’ accounts in this study, such certification is not necessarily a requirement for acquiring a teaching position in Toledo; rather it provides access to leadership as well as a heftier pay cheque. More opportunities exist for certified teachers to advance in their career. Many take on leadership roles in their communities such as becoming a principal, workshop facilitator or more recently, a literacy coach. It is unlikely that uncertified teachers would be considered for any of these types of professional advancements. Teachers felt that certification was a necessary step to becoming a more competent teacher and that they had learned valuable things about their own teaching practice by going back to school after having taught for some time.

*Language: “I learned the language in order to get through to my students”*

It is true that children living in Punta Gorda Town have been widely exposed to English before coming to primary school. Radio and television stations, restaurant menus and street signs are all in English. The majority of children in the district, however, are Mayan Indians and live in rural villages. They have had little contact with the rest of the district and likely do not hear any English until their first day of school. Newport (2003) reports that approximately one quarter of these children repeat their first year of schooling, based on the fact that they do not understand what is going on in class.

A highly experienced and accomplished teacher in this study identified the language issue as being an on-going one for teachers in the district, beginning years ago when the Garifuna were the dominant ethnic group in the teaching profession. Being Garifuna himself, he knew very little about the Mayan languages, but was sent to various villages inland to teach. He listened carefully to his students and picked up the language as he went along. The students, in a similar fashion, would pick up some English along the way, until they eventually had a working understanding of the language. Simon describes this early part of his career as a Garifuna teacher venturing into a Q’eqchi village.

My pupils were all Q’eqchi’ and I didn’t know if I was getting through to them. There was only one child who had knowledge of English, so he helped me in terms of translation. I began to pick things up though – I would notice a repetition of behaviours or words and was able to figure out that “oh, so this is what happens, when this has been said.” I just listened to them and watched them

and figured out things from there. I learned the language in order to get through to my students. (Simon)

In some ways this provided for a rich learning environment as both teacher and student learned languages from each other. The problem existed, however, as the children spent so much time learning the language there was little time left to cover other content areas. Interestingly, members of the community at that time (specifically the parents of the children) readily accepted the fact that non-Q'eqchi were going to teach their children. These parents likely attended primary school themselves taught by non-Q'eqchi, and were accustomed to it.

Most participants reported that the learning environment for minority language learners has been improving, for two reasons. Firstly, there are now more Mayan teachers teaching in the system who can work with students in their native tongue. As previously mentioned, this is due in part to the opening of an additional high school in an area where more Mayans reside. Secondly, as the children grow and advance through the various grade levels, they become exposed to more English by their teachers and peers and come to understand it better. This does not mean, however, that all challenges related to language disappear. Nalla describes her current teaching situation in a Mopan Maya village with Standard VI students. Because she is Mopan Maya herself, she is able to translate for them.

Most of my students speak Mopan Maya as their first language, making English their second language which is also challenging. I do speak that language though so I sometimes use that language so that they can understand some of the larger

words. I just translate for them. 12 of the 16 teachers at our school are Mopan Maya people. (Nalla)

Although there have been efforts over the years to employ some type of bilingual education, at least for students in the early years, it is unlikely that the national language is going to change. Most teachers consider this a challenge they deal with on a regular basis. Many felt it was their responsibility to teach the children in a language they understood. Newport (2004), mentioned earlier in an earlier section, confirms this as almost half of the Toledo teachers he surveyed were in favour of some form of bilingual education. The most popular choice was to teach in English, with some first language facilitation.

*As an English-speaking educated woman, living in a bilingual country where English dominates and is understood everywhere, this is almost unfathomable. Even in my first teaching year, in southern California, with several students who only spoke Spanish, I had a full time assistant who translated for them all day long. It was not until I completed all the interviews in this study that I became cognizant of the magnitude of this issue and the challenges that both teachers and students face in Toledo. As I listened to these teachers, I became brutally aware of the injustices associated with educational opportunities for the majority of learners in the district of Toledo.*

***Transition Mode: “Now I realize that the children are the focus”***

Teachers in Toledo today find themselves in a somewhat awkward spot, yet ripe for learning and leadership. Most are products of a colonial driven education system but teach children who will need the skills and attitudes necessary to think for themselves and contribute to a relatively new nation. The challenge lies in the fact that an education

system that operated for such a long time to subjugate people now needs to somehow get these same people to achieve a level of conscientization that will allow them to define their own problems and realize their own potential. Freire (2003) defines such conscientization, or critical consciousness, as “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (Freire, 2003, p. 35).

Most teachers in this study report they are indeed beginning to make the shift from a teacher-centered classroom to a more student-centered and student friendly environment. They have learned this in large part from formal teacher education programs as well as professional development workshops. After attending workshops or discussing ideas with mentors and/or peers they have begun to learn alternative strategies used to teach. Anne describes the shift she has made in her classroom.

In the beginning I was a very teacher-centered teacher. I would stand up in front of the class and teach. Then I would go around and make sure they were going their work. If they did something wrong I would put a big “X” on their work. Now I realize that the children are the focus. Now I walk around and talk to them about their work and if I see something that is not correct I will ask them if they know of any other ways to complete it and to please go back and try again. I have learned these things by going back to school. They taught us about different methodologies and how children learn. Coming to the TFABB workshops has also helped me to change over time. For example, I do a lot of grouping in my class because in groups children learn from one another and live with one another. I also do one to one conferencing with children. I use different

strategies in my class (ie. brainstorming, discussion, questions/answers, demonstrations, role play, dramatization and the list goes on). (Anne)

Participants claim that engaging children to participate fully, encouraging them to ask questions in class and learn cooperatively have only become recent practices in their classrooms. Winsor and Hansen (1999) support this admission. While working with teachers in Toledo as late as the mid 1990s, they reported that language arts classes they observed still often included the teacher copying exercises from curriculum materials on the chalkboard, the children copying them into their notebooks and then the teacher correcting the exercises.

A more constructivist approach to teaching and learning however *is* beginning to take shape in the district. It is possible to connect this new educational approach with other new behaviours exhibited in some classrooms. For example, after modeling her past teachers' practice of capital punishment for quite some time, Olivia began to realize that there were alternative methods to disciplining her students.

In the beginning I did not know about positive reinforcement or anything like that. I began to realize though, that "whipping" a student is not the best method of disciplining. Eventually I learned many new things that have changed the way I teach. I think I learned much by going to different workshops...Now I know that discipline is just a way to change behaviour and when I learned that I started to practice positive reinforcement. (Olivia)

From all accounts, teachers are making a concerted effort to adjust their teaching styles as well as subject content matter to accommodate the students they teach. Interviewees explained that teaching experience and collaboration with colleagues have

been key factors in making the necessary shift to provide more suitable and relevant education to their students. Participants in this study passionately proclaim that they yearn for their students to graduate from high school and be able to think critically, work cooperatively and have a deeper understanding of their personal and cultural history.

### **Social Networks in Learning to Teach**

Toledo teachers claim they engage in much professional discussion at various stages of their journey in learning to teach. Supported by previously cited research, it is possible to refer to this type of teacher learning as “Community of Learners – Toledo Style”. Teachers involved as participants in this study specifically identified fellow teachers and principals as well as family members as being instrumental in the growth and development of their professional knowledge.

#### ***Teachers: Sharing with colleagues***

Despite the apparent animosity some teachers hold toward one another, as illustrated in the previous section, teachers in Toledo embrace opportunities to be intellectuals and value their connection as part of a community of learners. McIntyre and Hager (1992) report that “collegiality has been demonstrated to be a critical factor in helping individual teachers to develop their classroom practice” (p. 276). This collegiality and sharing of knowledge happens both formally and informally at various locations throughout the district of Toledo. Formal opportunities for such peer learning traditionally occur at schools and depend on a variety of factors, including school size and philosophy of the principal. There are four large schools in the district with single grade classrooms; the rest are small schools containing mostly multi-grade classrooms. In

larger schools, regular meetings take place with those who teach common grades. At St. Peter Claver School for example, the largest in the district with over 900 students, grade wide meetings occur once a week on campus after school. Both content to be taught and methodology used are discussed at such meetings. Groups of teachers also organize themselves to work and learn in off-campus settings, meeting on weekends to discuss unit plans for their level of instruction. In larger schools, teachers of the same grade level are expected to cover the same material at roughly the same time. Often teachers will begin the year with a similar unit in Social Studies, for example, and move to the next unit together as a team. Such small group planning is necessary for this to be orchestrated smoothly. This type of planning involves much discussion and encourages sharing of ideas and learning from one another.

In my very first year, I was teaching Standard II. There were two other teachers who were also teaching that level and so we would work and plan together every weekend. That helped me a lot. I definitely benefited from the help I received from my peers along the way. (Dora)

In smaller, more rural multi-grade schools teachers are more inclined to engage with their peers on an informal basis to learn about their profession and improve their practice. The physical school structure itself provides the obvious place for teachers to engage in such professional discussion. One teacher in this study claimed he learned much simply from observing another more experienced teacher and asking him questions related to his practice. In most cases there are few places to venture to at lunch time, so teachers commonly spend this time together, discussing various things including their profession. Mary teaches in a very small school about ten kilometers outside of Punta

Gorda Town. In her school, a daily discussion over lunch creates the space for professional development and the sharing of knowledge to occur organically. Olivia is the teaching principal at a very rural school an hour's drive from Punta Gorda. She identifies her peers as being a constant in her growth as a teacher.

From the start, I learned from peers. There were seven teachers in my first school so I would just go to them when I needed help. I would ask them "How do you do this or that?" Then I would go back to my class to try it. It was helpful to work with my peers. This is how I have learned a lot over the years. I made a lot of mistakes, but learned from them. My peers have always been good for me.

(Olivia)

In addition to the school setting, professional learning for teachers in Toledo also occurs on an informal basis at various locations throughout the district. It is common for teachers to work at home on weekends with colleagues who live and work in the same village, often sharing ideas and suggestions as they create their weekly planning schemes.

Most of Toledo's primary schools are located in small villages outside of Punta Gorda Town, resulting in many teachers relying on public transit for transportation. Teachers living in Punta Gorda often take the bus daily to and from their rural schools. Teachers living and working in remote villages take the bus weekly (or sometimes monthly) to Punta Gorda to collect much needed provisions as well as collect and cash pay cheques. Such bus rides provide unusual yet rich opportunities for the sharing of professional knowledge. Javier, a participant in the pilot study (Achtem, 2006), describes this experience.

There are several teachers on the same bus together. We talk about our plans for the weekend as well as our students and challenges we faced that week at school.

(Javier)

*My initial teaching assignment was in a very rural school with only three teachers; two with no experience and a head teacher with one year of teaching experience. Because of our challenging classroom situations (ie. physical set up of the school, lack of supplies and background of students), we quickly turned to each other for support. We were all foreigners in the small town and spent most of our time together outside of school as well. Conversations naturally led to the organization of our small school, our teaching practice and our students. I vividly remember my head teacher spending time in my class observing some of the students exhibiting challenging behaviour. We would then discuss the issues and bounce ideas off each other (ie. behaviour charts and different seating plans) until we came up with a strategy that might work. There was much trial and error in this process as neither of us was experienced. We would plan together then execute multiple strategies in an attempt to keep our classrooms running smoothly. We drew from each other rather than any voice of authority.*

*Years later during my first teaching assignment in Victoria, I would once again rely on this collegiality. It was here that I really learned to teach. With teaching experience came confidence. With confidence came risk taking. With risk taking came growth. I would not have been able to move forward with my practice if my colleagues had not encouraged me to take the necessary risks to improve my teaching practice.*

*It would seem there are more similarities than differences between my early teaching experiences and those of the beginning teacher in Toledo. We both experienced a certain degree of the “sink or swim” analogy with immersion in the profession right from the start. We both coped the best we could and relied on peers to help us along the way, resulting in much mutual learning about the process of teaching.*

Teachers in this study readily admitted that the more they interact with colleagues about their profession, the more they want to learn about and improve upon their practice. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) identify this as knowledge *of* practice as it comes from systematic inquires about teaching, learning, curriculum and assessment. The Literacy Coaches Program implemented in Toledo illustrates such teacher learning, a group of experienced teachers highly dedicated to enriching the professional knowledge of teachers throughout the district. Henderson (2001) identifies “transformative teacher leaders” as working toward professional growth of teachers. They are educators who are deeply committed to their own journey of professional growth, eagerly participate in collaborative study activities with their colleagues and willingly assume school reform responsibilities (Henderson, 2001). Literacy coaches in Toledo collaborate with their colleagues in a spirit of collegial inquiry. The ones interviewed in this study claim that being a literacy coach was a responsibility they did not take lightly as it provided a powerful opportunity for them to mentor their peers. Workshop participants agree explaining learning from their peers is effective as sometimes their peers are able to explain things in a way they can better understand it.

*There is little documentation showing teachers as researchers and/or transformers of education in Toledo. Despite this fact, I have seen it with my own eyes,*

*time and time again. To the best of my knowledge, the Literacy Coaching Program is the only one of its kind in the country. In a district that traditionally scores sixth of the six national districts and several percentage points below the national average on the language arts section of the national Primary School Exam (PSE), things began to change after the Literacy Coaching Program. In May 2008 two years into the Literacy Coaching Program, Toledo nearly matched the national average and ranked fourth out of six in language arts. I recognize that my thinking may be biased, as there is no evidence of a direct correlation between The Literacy Coaching Program and the improved national ranking. Regardless, the dedication of the teachers involved in mentoring their fellow teachers has been impressive. They are all volunteers and are part of the program because they want to see their education system improve and it has. They have a rawness that makes all they do authentic.*

***Principals: First and foremost teachers***

Principalship in Toledo usually involves managing all aspects of a school on top of a full time teaching assignment. Principals are in effect responsible for the complete running of a school. This not only includes overseeing the teachers' plans and the students' work, but the physical structure of the school as well. They often find themselves fundraising to purchase daily supplies, furniture and even toilets. If a rural school is fortunate enough to have electricity, principals sometimes have to find ways to pay the utility bills. In some cases they may discover that students are coming to school with empty stomachs and feel compelled to find the means to feed these children. From all accounts, principals have extremely demanding jobs and often dip into their own already shallow pockets to keep their schools afloat.

Despite such busy schedules, the interviewees in this study describe much assistance provided by their principals in their journey to learning to teach. Each of them confirmed that their school principal was always ready to help and was an influential mentor. It can be inferred that principals in Toledo consistently display an understanding that a principal is first and foremost a teacher, whether teaching students or fledgling rookie teachers.

I began teaching with a nun – Sister Ann. She would come in my class often and help me with things. She was a teaching principal. She was the most influential person in my early teaching career. I remember that she was very strict about me doing my “daily notes”. I didn’t want to do them every week and sometimes I wouldn’t do them...but she caught me and made me sit down and do all the ones I was missing. From then on, I always did the “daily notes”.

(Anne)

Another participant claims that his principal not only helped him immensely in the classroom, but was also the one who encouraged him to attend formal teacher education. He claims the mentorship of his principal early in his career was key to the longevity of his career.

Teachers in this study who were also principals made similar comments from their perspective. All three agreed that their own principal was influential in their own learning. Furthermore, they saw it as common practice or almost tradition. When they became principals they instinctively knew that mentoring new teachers was an important component of their leadership. They also added that more and more opportunities were becoming available for them to engage in specific educational sessions relating to the

duties of a principal, including mentorship. Because many of the current literacy coaches are also principals, they are able to mentor their teachers in the implementation of new curriculum, materials and strategies. In addition, and more recently, principals have collaborated with each other at TFABB workshops to identify what it means to be a leader in a school in Toledo, how to know if your leadership approach is working and what interventions to try if it is not.

*It is surprising that teaching principals in Toledo have time to teach their own classes, let alone mentor new teachers. Despite my extensive experiences in the area, I am still not sure why they are charged with such daunting tasks. I wonder why there isn't more central support for these individuals. Being a teaching principal in an isolated village in Toledo is clearly one of the most challenging jobs in the field of education in the region. Roberta, a participant from the pilot study (Achtem, 2006), describes her job as a teaching principal.*

Being a principal is a big job. I have to keep that school afloat. I have to write project proposals. The British High Commission gave us some chairs – social security gave us some phones. The parish/mission does give us some money to buy things like the photocopier, for example. Of course, I have to teach my class and help my teachers too. (Roberta)

*Clearly a principal's work in Toledo is never done. It makes me wonder why anyone would really want to be a principal. As a teaching principal, Dora spends 4-5 hours planning her own weekly teaching scheme before she takes her staffs' home on Monday of each week. She provides feedback and makes comments. She says that it is so much work that she really doesn't want to be a principal anymore. I don't blame her.*

***Family Members: A family tradition***

Teachers also consider family members as mentors on their journey to becoming teachers. There are countless examples of family members learning to teach as part of an extended family in Toledo. In fact, more than half of the participants in this study stated that family members were not only influential in their choice of career, but that they also gained knowledge about the profession from family members. Many teachers in this study had brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, husbands and wives who were also teachers. If one person in the extended family happened to take a class or attend a workshop, the others were quick to ask questions, borrow books and discuss teaching together.

Retired teacher Gail was an accomplished and respected teacher and principal. She had taken on numerous leadership roles in the community including her work with TFABB. Her son became a teacher, and lived in a section of her house. They often ate meals together and talked about teaching. She shared teaching stories with him as well as materials and supplies. She was instrumental in her son's choice of career. Diego's brother and sister were both teachers. They were the ones who informed him about the TFABB workshops and all they had learned. They convinced him to attend to enrich his own professional practice. Mary identified her husband as someone who often discussed teaching issues with her.

Because my husband is also a teacher, there have been many times over the years that we would just sit down and discuss things that have gone on in our classrooms. We were always there to support each other. He is a person who likes to learn too and we share ideas with each other often. (Mary)

*Although teaching is a family tradition with some of my colleagues in Canada and the United States, the connection is not nearly as palpable as in Toledo. There was certainly nobody in my own family who encouraged me to enter into the profession; in fact, quite the opposite. Although teaching is a reputable career for a woman in my part of the world, there are several other occupations that come with more prestige and a much higher pay cheque. It could be argued that in Toledo, however, teaching is a highly respected and valued profession that easily elevates teachers to a high social status. For women in particular, it is one of very few jobs that provide economic stability and independence. The most prestigious jobs in Toledo are traditionally occupied by males (ie. banker, politician, and education official). Based on my experiences in Toledo over the years, I can assume that individuals enter the profession for one or more of the following reasons. Some are encouraged by family members, some want to be able to put a roof over the heads of their own children and some truly desire to transform their communities.*

Teachers in this study revealed their role as a parent as being influential in their career as well. After having children of their own, they described an increase in both empathy and patience when working with students in their classes. The ones that had school aged children explained that one on one tutoring with homework helped them better understand the frustrations some of their students encountered. One male participant described the influence of his own daughter on his teaching practice.

My daughter has definitely influenced the way in which I teach. Before I had her, I would sometimes treat my students in a negative way (like whipping them) and I now realize that this is not the way to discipline. I didn't have all that love for

children that I have now. I think I probably had that love, but it was sort of camouflaged until I had a child of my own. I have more patience to deal with children now. I just try to encourage my daughter, and my students, to take the right steps in life. I do not punish them physically at all now. Without laying a finger on them, I feel that I can help them to do the right thing. (Juan)

*This is by no means specific to Toledo or even Belize. Having a child of my own has opened my eyes to the true journey a child takes as a learner and that each child indeed has a completely different background he or she brings to this place we call school. I had only been a parent for five months when I interviewed Juan for this study. It wasn't until I went back to the classroom and taught again that I fully understood what he meant by his love being camouflaged until he had a child of his own. Rather than seeing students in my class, I began to see individual human beings. I became a more acute listener realizing that each and every one had a story to tell.*

### **Practice to Theory to Practice**

This theme connects closest with the journey Toledo teachers take in their professional learning, most commonly from practice to theory to practice. Where possible, the extraction and interpretation of details from the data have been aligned with established learning theories throughout this section. “Theory” as described by participants and interpreted by the researcher is identified and discussed. This section also draws heavily on what has essentially framed most of this study – Cochrane-Smith and Lytle’s (1999) conceptions of teacher learning. The voice of theory is woven into the teachers’ experiences throughout this segment.

Evidence suggests that teacher learning in Toledo is deeply rooted in constructivist thought as much knowledge is developed by making meaning from the teachers' own experiences. The culture of education in the region, however, is still built on positivist assumptions. Those subscribing to such a paradigm contend that there is a particular reality that is to be captured, studied and understood (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) and that knowledge is based on objective measures rather than professional judgement based on lived experiences. In Toledo, this is evidenced in the way teachers are managed and to a certain extent, the way in which they are taught at formal educational institutions. Ironically, teachers attending formal schooling in Toledo are far from "empty vessels" as they have accumulated much teaching experience. Teachers experience this tension between the science and art of teacher learning as they engage in theory outlined in a somewhat artificial learning environment, and construct meaning out of it for use in their classrooms. Achtem (2006) cites an experienced teaching principal in Toledo, making a critical observation about the timing of formal education for the Toledo teacher.

Teachers coming right from high school were very motivated. When these people then become trained, they have already been in the classroom so the work is relevant and they can imagine how it could be used because they have already been there in the classroom and they can relate to it and readily use the information and teaching strategies. But now with the associate degree, some do get the qualification first, but they really don't have the "know how" to work in the classroom. They are not trying to get anything out of it. They are just taking the course. (John)

*This was the only person (from either my pilot study or this dissertation study) who was able to make this connection. Although many did express that they learned much about teaching from teaching, the participant quoted above was the only one who explicitly identified prior classroom practice as being an asset before returning to formal schooling. As the culture of education is, as previously identified, based on positivist assumptions, I can assume that the teachers may not have felt that knowledge gained before formal schooling was the kind of knowledge that “counted”. When I looked back on the interview data, I saw there was very little discussion about knowledge before formal schooling. This practical knowledge is something that is not always “counted” in the minority world either. Clandinin (1986) contends that*

Teachers are commonly acknowledged as having had experiences but they are credited with little knowledge gained from that experience. The omission is due in part to the fact that we have not had ways of thinking about this practical knowledge and in part because we fail to recognize more practically oriented knowledge (p. 8-9).

*Frankly, and after deliberate reflection, I am disappointed in myself for not digging deeper into this as part of this study. I count myself as one of those who, at the time, unknowingly, did not “count” this practical knowledge. I didn’t acknowledge the signs provided in the account of the teaching principal in the pilot study. At that time, I associated knowledge with what these teachers were going to learn at University or at TFABB workshops.*

*Another area I should have explored further with the teachers was their understanding and definition of “theory”. When considering the journey teachers in*

*Toledo commonly take from practice to theory back to practice, I was aware of the generalities associated with what it meant to be a “practicing” teacher. I was not, however, as clear about “theory”. Because I did not ask any of the participants directly about theory, I was left not knowing. I assumed they learned theory at University, but was unclear as to what that entailed. I wondered if it was similar to the theory I had studied. Simon was one of only two participants who took the conversation to specific theory. He expressed that this knowledge made him a better teacher and even provided an example.*

At teachers’ college, we were introduced to the developmental stages of children (concrete operational, semi-concrete operational, etc.) as well as J. Piaget and B. F. Skinner. From there, I continued to read about these theories of learning which has helped me to become a better teacher. It is important to realize that if you are not “getting through” to your students one way, that you have to be flexible/innovative and try something new. As a teacher now, I have choices in terms of how to deal with students and getting through to them with ideas.

(Simon)

Most teachers in this study agreed that they had learned much at University that informed their classroom practice. They did not refer to specific theory driven practices, but practices that they could add to their teacher tool-kit, including methodologies of teaching and various teaching strategies. Although these may not technically be classified as theories, there is considerable difference and even dispute across academic disciplines as to the proper usages of the term. For the purpose of this inquiry, local teachers’ description of “theory” has been interpreted as anything learned outside the classroom (usually organized by a facilitator, or something located in a text) deemed useful to their

teaching practice. For example, teachers might learn about peer conferencing at a workshop and refer to that strategy as a theory. They would then attempt to actualize that theory back in their classroom in practice. This does not negate the fact that sometimes teachers create their own theory, or hunch, based on their interaction with students inside the classroom. Generating such knowledge and theorizing about classroom practice are characteristics of “knowledge OF practice” found in Cochrane-Smith and Lytle’s (1999) conceptions of teacher learning.

***Practice to Theory: “I was able to label things that I was already doing”***

As has been previously discussed at length, teachers in Toledo most often enter the profession with very little if any pre-service teacher education. They become teachers the moment they step foot in their classrooms, not after a piece of paper tells them so. It goes much further than the “sink or swim” analogy for the beginning teacher though. Those in the profession embrace this challenge and understand it to be a viable method of learning. It is a traditional and respected means of learning to teach. These teachers formulate understandings about teaching based on the interaction of what they already know and what they are faced with in the classroom. Learning in this context is social and situational as teachers construct knowledge through trial and error and deliberate reflection (Navarro & Verdisco, 2000; Munby et al., 2001). Participants in this study describe this phenomenon. “I have come to know what I know by personal experience” (Juan). “I have learned most about teaching, on the job” (Anne).

*Rooted in a constructivist philosophy, learning from experience has always been my best teacher. I am not sure, however, that I would have felt ready to teach without at least some formal preparation. Most of the participants in this study agreed; they were*

*just not ready for the task at hand. It begs the question as to how effective they were as beginning teachers and exactly what it was they learned “on the job” at the start of their career. This is an area I would have liked to discuss further with the teachers. I would guess that their learning was most apparent in areas of immediate need: lesson planning (required by management) and classroom management (required for survival). I would argue that relevant and appropriate theory driven practices may not have been a priority at the start of their careers.*

As reported by several study participants, teaching in the more remote villages of Toledo can be an isolated existence that forces teachers to become their own organizers of learning. Olivia began her career in a small village only accessible by boat at the time. She had little guidance at the start of her career and learned a great deal about teaching from teaching. Her professional expertise has been developed from within the profession itself; it is embedded in her life and has been acquired through living and teaching.

My journey to becoming a teacher has not always been an easy one. I am a self-educated and a self-motivated person. I had to figure things out for myself.

Most things that I learned have been through trial and error. (Olivia)

Olivia’s experience is not unique and illustrates a constructivist approach to learning. She drew on past experiences to discover principles on her own and construct knowledge by working to solve her own problems. Connelly and Clandinin (2000) contend that this knowledge comes from experience, is learned in context and is expressed in practice. The practical knowledge Olivia generated was a direct result of her experience as a teacher (Fenstermacher, 1994).

Despite various challenges, teachers in Toledo eventually do find ways to further their education through formal schooling. Time, money, family commitments and location of classes all present obstacles but not impossibilities. These teachers are accustomed to challenges and are resilient and resourceful individuals. When they are ready to return to school most cannot afford to quit their jobs, so must attend classes in the evenings after a full day of teaching – often until 10:00 pm. Most teachers reside in remote villages, making it a very long trip into Punta Gorda for these classes. Weather almost always affects these trips. During the rainy season it not uncommon for bridges to be washed away, suspending travel indefinitely. Without phone lines or electricity, it is unlikely a student would be able to catch up on any work missed.

Topics covered in formal teacher education programs, interpreted as “theory” by teachers in Toledo, include teaching strategies, methodologies, planning and child development. In the minority world this knowledge is more or less delivered from experts in the field of education to relatively novice teachers, resulting specifically in knowledge transfer as opposed to knowledge construction or creation. Although these same positivist assumptions exist in Toledo, the teacher education programs are designed with the experienced teacher in mind. While the transmitting of knowledge does indeed occur, it is also understood (by *some* teacher educators) that students in the program have teaching experience and are, as previously mentioned, far from “empty vessels”. At times it is the students who formulate ideas, generate knowledge and theorize about classroom practice, as teachers come with ideas and concerns related to their teaching experience to share with their colleagues. They are valued as producers of valid, reliable knowledge about

teaching. Juan explains rich discussions that occur in his program as many of his classmates are experienced teachers with many stories to share about their teaching.

I learn a lot from my classmates and the experiences that they share in our classes at University. Sometimes I will ask them for advice about a certain situation and then I just listen to what they have to say. I then compare the feedback that I get from them all and use what I can in my own teaching practice. (Juan)

In effect, Juan was collecting his own data, analyzing it, then generating his own theory.

This quote illustrates the effectiveness of learning from peers, another form of constructivist learning – social constructivism, where knowledge is constructed when individuals engage socially in talk and activity about shared problems or tasks. Davis, Sumara and Luce-Kapler (2000) claim that such theories invoke a shared *labour* in which complex knowing is distributed across a web of individuals. They state that “...we are usually better thinkers in the presence of others, particularly others whose competencies are more developed” (p. 67). This supports Vygotsky’s social learning theory, more specifically, zone of proximal development, where social interaction precedes cognitive development. Dialogue is an important tool in the zone of proximal development (Chaiklin, 2003).

Although there has been a shift to a more constructivist approach to learning and teaching in the minority world as well (Darling-Hammond, 1999), the assumption still exists that knowledge gained in formal teacher education programs falls into the category referred to as knowledge *for* practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Although this knowledge is intended to be acquired first and used at a later date, the Belizean teacher is likely already familiar with some of it whether they realize it or not. Mary, for example,

states that formal education helped her to label things that she was already doing with students in her classroom.

Some of the things I learned in formal teacher education classes, I was already doing in my classroom. I just didn't know that they were called that. It helped me to put a name to certain things. So, I was able to label things that I was already doing. For example: cooperative learning, peer tutoring, integrative teaching methods. (Mary)

This quote illustrates Mary's transformative learning. The situated learning she experienced as a teacher allowed her to know before she even knew that she knew. At that point she was not a knower of the known, which as Fenstermacher (1994) claims, is a critical objective of teacher learning. Although teachers in this study indicated they felt more comfortable after some formal education, it was clear that this learning merely enhanced the already vast amount of teacher knowledge they had accumulated to this point in their career. They were already teachers and had learned much through the act of teaching. This learning through experience supports a constructivist approach to learning, rejecting a more typical or unquestioned theory of learning inherent in the expert to novice relationship.

*I have mixed feelings about Mary's comments and the role I may have played in her thinking. On the one hand, I am happy that she is able to claim her knowledge as legitimate. She mentioned more than once to me that she was already practicing many of the things learned in University as well as at TFABB workshops; that she just didn't know what they were called. I can assume that this helped Mary to feel she was part of a wider professional community that supported her knowledge. On the other hand, I feel*

*like we (formal institutions, TFABB) are responsible for replacing her own local terms with something imported from the minority world. Who am I to say that something should have this name or that name? Why not fully legitimize her knowledge and agree to the name she is attaching to the strategy? During a recent workshop I was describing to Mary (and others) what a “mini-lesson” was. After our discussion, Mary informed me that she used a similar strategy but called it something different. She said, “I just tell the kids we are going to ‘stick a pin in it’ and then I elaborate on the topic.”*

Overall, it is clear that Belizean teachers develop much practical knowledge before attending formal schooling. The teaching experience and practical knowledge gained allow them to fully engage in their learning as they are able to contextualize what they are taught in the University setting. They are able to construct new knowledge by connecting any prior knowledge developed in practice (situated learning) to the content taught. Gaining teaching experience before attending formal education is a concept that minority world teacher educators and researchers are considering. Both Fenstermacher (1993) and Russell (1995) contend that teacher education programs in the minority world would benefit by having students gain extensive classroom experience before attending college for teaching theory and pedagogy. In an experimental practice teaching situation highlighted earlier in this dissertation, students who had been in the classroom for nine weeks prior to entering the teacher education program had more “need to know” than those who had not experienced classroom teaching first (Russell, 1995). Korthagen, Loughran and Russell (2006) agree, but caution teacher educators to carefully consider the amount of time spent gaining practice experience. They report that in an attempt to restructure teacher education in the United States late in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, an emphasis on

practice rather than theory came to the fore. In some ways, however, this limited teacher education to "...learning the tricks of the trade, without much deepening through theory" (p. 1021). This meant that the issue of connecting theory and practice was still not being addressed. It could be argued that teacher learning might be best achieved by careful and reflective commutes, back and forth, between theory and practice.

*I argue that Belizean teachers may have it all figured out – albeit unintentionally. Some degree of practical experience before attending formal schooling may indeed provide a situation ripe for learning. As an undergraduate student, I was not able to fully engage in my learning, as I had difficulty accepting the relevance and applicability of some of the content I studied. As a graduate student twelve years later however, quite suddenly, things began falling into place – making me thirst for more. After teaching in a variety of classroom situations, I was able to make connections to the content covered. The more connections I was able to make to my teaching, the more I wanted to learn about my practice. One example I remember clearly related to risk management working in a gymnasium setting. It wasn't until I had a class of 35 students running around the gym that I began to really understand the potential hazards and safety issues inherent in the teaching situation. Similar experiences occurred in my language arts classes. Although I had learned about different theories of learning in University, I employed a teacher-centered approach early in my career. It wasn't long before I realized, however, that not all my students were thriving. After observing other teachers and discussing alternatives with them, I began to employ more group work in my class, supporting a social constructivist theory where learners build understandings together. Today, my language arts class could be described as organized chaos, as I employ a workshop*

*model in reading and writing where students often work together to develop and display their knowledge and understandings.*

***Theory to Practice: “There should definitely be a plan of some kind”***

Applying theory to practice is a necessary ingredient for effective teaching, yet a difficult task for any teacher no matter where they live in the world. The gap between theory and practice is in fact, one of the central issues in teacher education. Despite gaining much teaching experience that helps contextualize theory into practice, teachers in Toledo still have to be creative and reflective to make the theory a reality in their classroom. Participants in this study explain that many times the theory they study is based on the “ideal” classroom with abundant materials and resources, the likes of which is rarely found in Toledo classrooms. Furthermore, weekly planning schemes written by teachers often depict a lesson that has all required materials and teaching aids, rendering them all but useless for the Toledo teacher. Many teachers spend hours on weekends completing these schemes as they are to be submitted to the principal Monday of each week. The principal, who is usually also a teaching principal, must read them, provide feedback and return them to the teachers. With the busy schedule of principals, teachers sometimes don’t get them back until mid-week, resulting in minimal practical value. This practice of principals implies an expert to novice relationship where principals display control through accountability. Teachers organize their lesson plans to show they understand a truth about educational practices in terms of planning. There is an emphasis on *what* the teacher has learned but not *how* he or she has learned it.

The lesson plans are a way of monitoring what you are supposed to be doing. It is so that people are held accountable for their planning and that they have some

kind of plan for the day/week. You need to show that you are ready for the week..... Each principal has his or her way of doing things, but there should definitely be a plan of some kind. (Simon)

*There was much discussion about the lesson plans and weekly schemes that teachers were required to submit. I got the distinct feeling that it was more of a formality than anything resembling a practical plan. It took me several years to understand this phenomenon, which I attribute to the “somebody is always looking over your shoulder” mentality illustrated in a previous section entitled “This is the way we do things here”. While I agree that holding teachers accountable for their teaching practices is necessary, the lack of professional autonomy associated with the detailed and dreaded weekly schemes serves only to further perpetuate the oppression of teachers in the region. Foucault describes this power of surveillance as a form of power that is exercised through silent coercion (Wood, 2003). In this case, the teachers believe they are under constant scrutiny and are driven to self-monitor their actions by dutifully completing their weekly schemes. Because I assumed ALL teachers submitted a plan, I did not think to ask about potential consequences for not submitting one. I wish I had asked.*

*As the conversations went on, I could not help but consider the flip side. My side. To be perfectly honest, I was a bit embarrassed. Although I have always kept a rough outline of what I plan to teach for the day/week, the only ones who are ever interested in viewing the plan are student teachers. I have not been asked for a unit overview or lesson plan from an administrator for over 20 years. The difference in accountability regarding teacher planning is astounding. It is surely understood that Belize is a young country and as such may not have had the time and resources to build up a competent teaching force.*

*Perhaps this “guiding of the teachers” however, is masked as another control mechanism, built again, on positivist assumptions – that there is one correct way to produce lessons and overviews. Because there is little time for the principal to engage with the plan or the planner, it is at best, a rough guide for the teacher. A template for a Belizean primary school teacher’s lesson plan can be found in Appendix F.*

### Workshop learning

Of great significance in this investigation was the exploration of TFABB’s impact in the region, specifically related to the newly developed Literacy Coaches Program. All interviewees had expressed the importance of previous TFABB workshops in consistently providing professional development for the teachers in their district. It was clear from all discussions that participants perceived the workshops as an effective means to develop professionally. It was however, not without flaws. After several consecutive summer workshops, it was revealed (on several workshop evaluation forms) that the transfer of strategies covered in the summer sessions to the classroom was not apparent and, in fact, could be the missing link in the learning. This was not an uncommon discovery as much professional development of this nature (one or multiple day workshops) results in little carry-over to the classroom (Wilson & Berne, 1999). In addition, feedback received as part of my pilot study pointed to the fact that teachers enjoyed the workshops very much, but had difficulty implementing the strategies back in their classrooms for two reasons: they lacked the supplies necessary to conduct the lesson or they had simply forgotten the strategy. In effect, the transfer from theory to practice for workshop participants was weak.

In an attempt to assist with “carry-over” to the classroom, and in response to the local teachers’ requests, TFABB made two significant adjustments to the workshop. The first was the addition of local literacy coaches. Although the Literacy Coaching Program has been previously discussed at length, it is revisited in the following section in light of its relevance to improving theory learned to teaching practiced. The second adjustment was to have facilitators as well as workshop participants actually begin to *model* teaching lessons. Up until that point workshop sessions involved a variety of things including lecture, group discussion and group presentations – but never the modeling of an actual lesson. By all accounts, teachers didn’t just want information or discussions *about* strategies, they wanted to *see* the strategy in practice and *practice* the strategy. In fact, Diego confirms that members of TFABB took his concerns from the previous year into account and designed the following year’s workshop accordingly.

These workshops are very useful, especially the new skills that were modeled to us. I asked for this last year in the evaluation form. I asked for modeling. It is one thing to just tell us something, but to **SHOW** us how to do it is much better. This is how we will be able to remember it and use it back in our classrooms.

(Diego)

TFABB was able to access important local knowledge and create the space for workshop participants to construct relevant meaning. It was hoped that the modeling of lessons at the workshops would provide a more realistic representation of what might occur in their classrooms, increasing the likelihood of such “theory” showing up in future practice.

As part of this shift in approach, all workshop participants were also required to take part in modeling a lesson in front of their peers. By all accounts, this helped them

immensely in remembering how to execute the strategy. Although they were in some sense mimicking the facilitators, they were also constructing the lesson to work in their own classroom. By taking on the role of teacher in their group of peers, they engaged in situated learning. Barab and Plucker (2002) support this form of construction of knowledge where the learner, the material to be learned and the context in which the learning occurs, are always connected. Nalla describes the value of such practice.

I learn by watching and also by teaching, so the mini-lessons that we had to model helped me as well. If I don't DO something then I will not really learn it.

(Nalla)

Teachers expressed satisfaction with the rich discussion that occurred after each lesson as they were able to reflect on their lessons and provide feedback for their peers, both critical aspects in experiential learning. Their eager learning nicely illustrated the words of the Chinese philosopher Confucius, "Tell me and I will forget, show me and I will remember, involve me and I'll understand."

### In-service learning

The Literacy Coaching Program was implemented, as previously mentioned, in an attempt to increase leadership among local teachers, to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of the larger annual workshop and to expand and deepen the impact of current teacher education efforts in the district (TFABB, 2009). It could be argued, however, that the most important goal of the program was to bridge the gap between theory and practice for teachers in Toledo by providing specific in-services throughout the year for the local teachers. Teachers interviewed agreed that the Literacy Coaching Program was well aligned with the recommendations of the local teachers.

When exploring the development of teachers' knowledge with respect to the Literacy Coaching Program, two distinct groups must be viewed: primary teachers who were also coaches and primary teachers who were not coaches. From all accounts, much learning occurred for both groups in this study. All participants believed their participation in the sessions had helped them to become more effective educators. They appreciated the in-services throughout the year as a means for colleagues to come together and share ideas related to their classroom practices. Nalla, who was not a coach, provides some specific examples of what has helped her to grow as a professional.

I was able to bring in samples of my students' work to the in-services and have it looked at and critiqued by a larger group. Feedback was provided for us based on our performance... on how effectively we were using the reading and writing strategies (ie. The Six Traits of Writing) provided for us during the summer TFABB workshop. (Nalla)

Another non-coach Anne, explains how the in-services held teachers accountable for their learning and professional development.

Even if you didn't want to use the strategies that were covered in the summer or the in-services, you were kind of forced to because we were asked to bring samples of student work, which meant that we had to have tried the strategies. This encouraged us to try the activities so that we had something to share at the in-services. This way we could see if the different teachers experienced the same thing as we did, when they tried the same activity. So this was a good way to share our lessons and see how things were going back in our different classes. (Anne)

In-services were designed to be led by facilitators, but collaborative in nature. As part of the writing sessions, for example, teachers brought in samples of students' writing to share with small groups of their peers. They discussed the piece and its effectiveness related to what they had learned at the summer workshops (ie. organization, word choice, voice, sentence fluency, etc.). Although the pieces of writing were loosely "assessed" the teachers themselves were not assessed in any way. As evidenced in the quote above, however, Nalla perceived *herself* as being evaluated. One can assume that she may have equated her students' abilities with her own teaching competencies.

The Literacy Coaching Program also proved very beneficial for the teachers who were also coaches. Each of the two that were interviewed for this study described their coaching experience as rewarding and educational as they took on the role of "teacher" among their peers. They both enjoyed sharing their knowledge and felt they made positive impacts on those they worked with. By teaching skills to others, they gained a deeper understanding of the skills taught, which helped them to grow as teachers.

By actually teaching the concepts and strategies myself (as a coach), I learned them very thoroughly and was able to take them back to my classroom. For example, we are asked to model skills that hopefully will become strategies for the participants such as: think aloud, predict, cause and effect. (Simon)

Mary loves to share her knowledge and described working with other teachers as a mutual learning experience. The following quote describes her feelings concerning the project.

My coaching partner and I have definitely had an impact on those who we have worked with over the year at the in-services. I have seen the transformation of

some teachers, from being resistant in the beginning to cooperating in the end. On the last day, there were a number of teachers who came up and told us that it had been a rewarding experience for them. One older teacher in particular (older than me) was very resistant in the beginning....but by the end he said that he was happy that I was patient with him about the “small moment” (writing strategy) and that he could now go back to his classroom and use it. (Mary)

The basic premise behind the “small moment” writing strategy was to help teachers, and in turn students, write rich descriptive detail about one small thing, or experience, rather than writing minimal detail about a number of different things. Workshop facilitators attempted to illustrate this strategy by taking a large well chewed piece of gum and stretching it out as far as their two hands could reach. This “small moment” turned out to be a “huge moment” for the teachers involved. Mary described the increase in her confidence as she was making a genuine connection with one of her colleagues. The participating teacher displayed much courage in finally admitting that there may be another way, perhaps a better way, of teaching his students how to write descriptively. It could be argued that a variety of things needed to “come together” for such transformational learning to take place. It is likely that as a facilitator, Mary created an environment that promoted safe and free exploration within the framework given, allowing the workshop participant to discover things on his own. In addition, and perhaps most importantly, the participant must have been ready to view the concept critically.

### **Insider/Outsider**

The formation of the United Nations (UN) in 1945 established a forum for much work related to international development, resulting in some of the world’s earliest

formal insider/outsider relationships. Facilitating cooperation in international law, international security, economic development, social progress, human rights and world peace, groups of people from one country (outsiders) ventured to other countries to work with the local people (insiders). The result of significant events much later, however, firmly put the global spotlight on the majority world. One of these events and perhaps the most memorable was the Band-Aid concert, organized by musician Bob Geldof and Midge Ure in 1984. This, along with subsequent campaigns (Live Aid, Live 8, Make Poverty History, etc.), ignited high level awareness and debate about global inequality. For the first time ever, those in the minority world were able to view images relating to starvation, poverty, disease and violence – all via the media. People were inspired to take action. In most cases, people from minority world organizations (the outsiders) would lend support to those living the reality in the majority world (insiders) in an attempt to right various injustices. With such action came the undeniable contention that those providing assistance possessed power and control. It could be argued that although many countries have benefited from this type of assistance, the imbalance of power has forever plagued the insider/outsider relationship. In addition, and as stated in an earlier section, many outsiders engage in the process without being well informed about the cultural contexts in which the support is directed, resulting in less than successful programs.

Belize is a recently independent majority world country with a long history of the insider/outsider relationship, as the growth of the country has been due in large part to outside help. Belize is attractive to many organizations in both Canada and United States as it is relatively close in proximity, English speaking and tropical. Over the years, outsiders have worked in many arenas, including education, to help improve programs

and increase human capacity. One of the most recent and consistent relationships in the field of education has been between Teachers for a Better Belize (TFABB) and local educators in Toledo. The precarious relationship has endured many bumps in the road. Although much growth has occurred with all involved, there are still many challenges inherent in the relationship.

***TFABB: Understanding the Outsider's Role***

Throughout its twelve year history TFABB has carefully considered its role as an outsider in Toledo, learning how to be most effective in the insider's world. Members of TFABB readily admit they were challenged with this in the infancy of their work. By presenting pre-packaged material to the local teachers during the first few years of their efforts (roughly 1997- 2000), they failed to engage the participants in the preparation, implementation and evaluation of their projects. Much knowledge was simply transferred from the outsider from the minority world (North American volunteer) to the insider in the majority world (local teacher in Toledo). Kanu (2005) and Zajda (2004) caution against this type of action, where transferring of educational ideas and practices to majority world countries is done without taking into consideration factors such as the traditional beliefs and cultural values. This early methodology employed by TFABB was incredibly top-down in nature and resulted in workshop audiences filled with relatively passive local teachers.

As members of TFABB learned more about Toledo and its people, they realized that to become more effective, they needed to enlist the help of some of the local teachers. It was one thing to read about a place and learn about its culture, but to spend three consecutive summers in the region attempting to facilitate teacher workshops was

quite another. Interacting and communicating with the educators in their rural communities was very different than reading about their education system on a comfortable couch back home. Local teachers working with TFABB, for example, were highly skilled at “thinking on their feet” and were able to make connections between material presented and the real world of a Belizean classroom. They would often “re-word” ideas presented to make them more meaningful and relevant for the participants. Despite the involvement of the local teachers, there was still a clear power imbalance between the local teachers and the North American volunteers at this time.

*I remember the first TFABB workshop I attended as a facilitator in 2003, where we presented our best teaching practices, as white skinned outside experts. Although I co-facilitated with a local teacher, I felt as if her involvement was little more than tokenistic. I had come with all the planned workshop material and was essentially doing most of the facilitating. It was difficult to engage my participants in discussion as they were busy trying to write every single syllable that come out of my mouth. Despite the fact that I explained repeatedly I had a handout for them covering all concepts, I barely saw their eyes; heads down, writing dutifully. This attention and respect was undeserved. I had flashbacks of my first banking experience in a small town in Zambia; I entered the crowded sea of black and was promptly whisked to the front of the line. The importance placed on me, both in the bank in Zambia and the classroom in Belize, was uncomfortable and awkward. I couldn't help but wonder what had led to this kind of a social condition.*

The local teachers' confidence grew as they participated more fully each progressive year. Specific, abundant and valid local knowledge that teachers brought to

the planning process each year was considered a necessary ingredient in the relationship. In addition, providing opportunities for local educators to become actively involved in their own professional development helped them to take more ownership of the process. Local teachers continued to provide the critical and much needed link to the insider's world, rarely visible to the outsider's eye. For example, local teachers' concerns centered on: the role of management, the lack of professional autonomy, language issues, multi-grade teaching, planning and limited supplies. Also of interest were the primal requests of the teachers relating to the format of the workshops such as: longer breaks, free lunches, earlier dismissal, and transportation to and from their villages, all indicative of their priorities and the way in which they view their world. Despite their desire to attend the workshop and learn something they could take back to their classrooms, of greater importance was that they would be fed a decent meal, have some time to relax and talk to colleagues and be able to get home in time for an evening meal with their family. Creating such time and space for teachers to work together helps to improve the learning and teaching of teachers (Hargreaves, 2001). TFABB was able to gain this valuable knowledge in a variety of ways including in depth discussions with local teachers as well as formal evaluation forms at the end of each summer workshop.

TFABB's continued attempt to provide more relevant learning and leadership opportunities for local teachers has helped some teachers to realize a shift in thinking. With an increased awareness that TFABB's focus was on development and not aid, some teachers began taking steps to own their knowledge and their profession learning. One compelling example is the Literacy Coaches Program designed and implemented by both North American volunteers and local teachers in 2006. This group of coaches mentored

their colleagues with respect to relevant educational concepts, curriculum and teaching strategies.

### ***Dual Roles of the Coach: Insider and outsider***

The Literacy Coaching Program illustrates a unique insider/outsider relationship. Having a role in both, the coaches are essentially a blend of the insider and outsider. On the one hand, they are Belizean and have first hand knowledge of the education system as well as way of life in Toledo. On the other hand, they work closely with volunteers from the United States and Canada learning new strategies to apply in their teaching practice to share with their colleagues. They have developed specific leadership skills that help them to share knowledge brought, in part, from the outside world. As previously detailed earlier in this dissertation, coaching skills included: engaging strategies, effective presentations, communication skills, goal setting, strategy design as well as the different “hats” coaches may wear. They have subsequently practiced their new skills and assisted fellow teachers at regular in-services during the school year. Although local teachers had presented at various workshops in the district before this time, this was a significant step in terms of length and frequency in their role as coaches among their peers.

It could be argued that in order for projects such as this to reach their full potential, membership of all participants in the process must be gained. The interviewees in this study, however, provided comments divided by gender. Interestingly and generally speaking, the female teachers stated that having local facilitators was beneficial as they felt it was time for their own colleagues to take the lead. When the North American volunteers left Toledo at the end of each summer, the women in the study felt it was wise to have some local teachers well versed in the strategies covered the previous summer.

I really applaud the coaches. It is hard work and they are doing a great job. In fact at this morning's workshop, I introduced my "coach". I like how they are using local Belizean teachers as coaches. So, if there is a time when you guys can't make it, then we have our coaches. (Olivia)

Male teachers on the other hand, did not feel the same which supported the notion that old habits may very well die hard. Their lack of confidence in their fellow teacher is evident in the following comment.

Generally, Belizeans do not really respect local facilitators professionally. We tend to believe that the North Americans will always do a better job than our own. The local facilitators are just not as vibrant or as knowledgeable. (Diego)

*From my observations of the workshops, there seemed to be an overall satisfaction with the fact that local teachers were taking an active role in the process. The ones I interviewed for this study, however, were able to provide deeper insight. I was not surprised by these comments. The women I spoke with seemed more congenial and empathetic. The men were more forthcoming with their comments and did not seem afraid to condemn a colleague. This seemed to be a general behaviour pattern (stereotypical or not) where the men were more aggressive and competitive while the women were more complacent and considerate of their peers. I suppose this could be attributed to various things including the fact that women were, and to a large extent still are, the main caregivers in large extended families throughout the district. A teacher in this study explains that when she was growing up "A woman's role was to stay at home and nurture the family" (Anne). If female teachers came from families like this, I can*

*assume that leaving the home to work was somewhat novel. Challenging authority or even their peers, was likely a risk they were not ready to take.*

*Although there are currently more women than men teaching in primary schools in the district, most of the management level positions are still held by men. In a district led predominately by the Catholic Church, this is no surprise. I doubt I will see a female priest associated with a Catholic Church in Belize, or anywhere in the world for that matter, in my life time.*

### ***Power and Control: Frustration for all***

Issues of power and control are inherent in an insider/outsider relationship. The fact that one party is assisting another inevitably leads to the belief that one party is in some way stronger. It could be argued that for those in the majority world of Belize, this type of assistance only serves as a reminder that someone else is in control. The influence of outsiders has been the norm in Belizean history. Mary explains that this perpetual control has stifled teachers for years in the district. She claims that being part of this research process was actually the first time anyone ever took the time to listen to her concerns about her profession. “I am happy to have shared with you. I now know that at least one voice was heard” (Mary).

Interestingly, part of TFABB’s mission has always been to empower teachers. By attempting to empower teachers, however, it could be argued that certain power is meant to be transferred from one group to another. The moment a group from a minority world organization sets foot on the soil in a majority world county, the power structure is set. The truth is that minority world organizations conduct work in the majority world because they feel they can offer some needed assistance. Rarely, if ever, does it occur the

other way around. There is no documentation of a Belizean organization working in Canada, to improve the development of Canada and/or its people. If there was, it would likely be viewed as an organization with more power than the people in Canada it was attempting to empower. It stands to reason then that people cannot be empowered when those attempting to empower them are the ones perceived as holding power and control. The following quote from a participant in this study illustrates that although TFABB has built solid relationships over the years in Toledo, an authentic transformation of power is still distant. “If you, as a member of TFABB suggest that we try something then I interpret is as *do this*. Maybe I am being blunt, but this is the way I feel” (Simon). Another interviewee expresses his views about local educators, perpetuating the notion of power and knowledge coming from the “outside”.

We are all teachers but sometimes, I am sorry to say, we act like animals. We do not appreciate our own local educators. We don't want one of our “own” to tell us what to do. We would prefer if someone “out of the blue” came and helped us with our teaching practice. Even if there are local teachers perfectly qualified to do the job, local teachers just don't want to hear from them. (Juan)

*This quote soundly illustrates Freire's (2003) claim that instead of striving for liberation, the oppressed (or formally oppressed) often become the oppressor. The very structure of their thought, the discourses they use to think with, has been conditioned by the situation in which they were shaped. As Freire states in relation to resistance to the ruling men, “Their ideal is to be men; but for them to be men is to be oppressors. This is their model of humanity” (Freire, 2003, p. 45).*

*As an educated North American white woman volunteering and researching in Belize, I am caught within a social construct that privileges me. I am perceived as the one with the power; my knowledge and perceptions are revered. Truthfully, I have done nothing to earn this treatment and at times during this research, possibly abused it. Teachers would bend over backward to meet with me for interviews, for example, when I knew they probably had to go home and cook for their families. I could have just as easily travelled to their small village to conduct the interviews, but they would not hear of that. All interviewees were extremely polite to me and spoke so highly of TFABB. Although I hoped all their interview accounts were authentic, I couldn't help but think they may be telling me what I wanted to hear. Could the lingering effect of the colonial, white man's supremacy be rearing its ugly head? I sincerely hoped not. In the end, however, I relied on, and gave credence to, the connections I had made with these people over the course of several years. I have concluded that, as an outsider, I did make a significant attempt at gaining an authentic insider's view.*

Effective insider-outsider relationships can flourish with mutual respect. The aim is for outsiders to not only provide effective and meaningful assistance to the insiders, but also respect indigenous knowledges and to understand that local people living the reality day in and day out, do in fact, have much to offer. Previously highlighted, Black (2002) explains that such work has to grow organically and build on existing knowledge and systems. It is not something done **to** someone, but done **with** someone.

*While writing this section, I scoured my interview data to find at least one quote about the importance of local knowledge - beliefs and perceptions the teachers held about the world around them, specifically related to their work as teachers. I found*

*nothing, which in itself, is something. That is not to say that participants did not share much local knowledge with me, as they did indeed. Rather, not one actually claimed that their knowledge was important and valuable in an insider/outsider relationship. I can only assume that they did not feel their own knowledge counted in this process. This is illustrated in my conversation with Mary, highlighted earlier. Mary did indeed have a specific name attached to her teaching strategy; local knowledge developed from her practice. When she heard me refer to the same strategy as something different, her expression of the term quickly matched mine, leading me to believe that she thought my term, was for some reason, more correct. If given the chance to speak with the participants again, I would delve further into the notion of the legitimacy of local knowledge. It may make them feel uncomfortable, but the potential it has for building their confidence and leading to change, would be worth it. I would consider shifting the line of questioning around allowing them to share such knowledge with me. For example, an ideal question might have been, "What would I need to know if I was to teach in a Toledo school?"*

*To conclude this section, I ponder my specific role as one outsider. From the genesis of this project, I have been an outsider, attempting to gain an insider's view. I have worked hard over the years to understand my role in the Belizean culture and learn about the people of Toledo in terms of the ways in which they organize themselves to live, work and learn. Each visit to the region allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the people and their world. I have endeavoured to stay true to the hybrid approach described by James (1996) - guidance from the minority world outsiders combined with indigenous ideas and needs. Despite my experience and knowledge gained, I will never*

*become an insider. This is, however, a strange reality for me to live. In Toledo tourists ask me for directions or where to eat. Children walking down the street call me by name. The former District Education Officer referred to me as “part Belizean” when introducing me at a recent summer workshop. I have friends in Toledo whom I call from Canada on a regular basis. All this, yet I am still not able to call myself an insider, nor do I have the right to strive to be one. I have no part in Belizean history, nor do I live their daily struggle. I can sympathize but not empathize, for I can share in their experiences, but not truly understand their existence.*

***Benefactors: Reciprocal learning is realized***

A final thought to consider with the insider/outsider dynamic, is the ultimate benefactor of this marriage. One would think that development projects mostly benefit those in the majority world who are so often in need of support and assistance. The results of this study, in fact, make a strong case for this type of learning. Olivia expressed her appreciation for the consistent assistance provided by an outside organization.

The North American volunteers have really helped me to learn the Language Arts strategies better. I have a better idea of how I am going to teach my lessons and I feel really good about that..... Teaching in Toledo has been an advantage for me. The TFABB workshops have been going on here for many years and I am so lucky to be part of this. I feel very lucky and special that we are getting so much attention. (Olivia)

Often times, however, the outsider gains as much, if not more, from the experience than the insider. Ironically, the literature that exists related to such outsiders working in Belize is characterized by non-Belizean teacher learning, as several outside organizations

(predominantly US colleges) offer programs where teachers travel to Belize to work with local teachers. Academics and students alike write about their adventures in different communities in Belize and what a wonderful learning experience it was for them – both in teaching and life in general. Perhaps Mary, a participant in this study expressed the mutual learning the best. “We do learn from teachers who come from other parts of the world, but you also learn from us”. (Mary)

Conversations with TFABB volunteers from North America revealed that much reciprocal learning had occurred over the years. Many drew inspiration from a culture with family and story telling at its heart. They became more aware of resources they used as teachers, choosing more traditional stories and culturally diverse materials in their classrooms back home. Others expressed the realization of the true meaning of collaboration. Co-facilitators shared openly and tapped into each others’ strengths with a goal in mind that would benefit all workshop participants. The underlying theme present in all the learning, however, was that they considered themselves much more similar to the local teachers than different. Despite visible differences, they were akin on the inside and had all chosen to become educators in the hopes of making a difference in the lives of children.

*Although I strongly believe in making connections with people to create positive change, I am the first to admit that my relationship with Belize and its people would not have lasted this long if I was not benefitting from it as well. My personal experience in Belize as an outsider allows me to speak volumes about what I have gained from the teachers in Belize. My work there fills me up and makes me feel as though I am making a difference. The satisfaction I gain is greater than what I experience teaching at home,*

*probably because the need is perceived as more dire. Of course, there are specific practical things I have learned from the teachers as well.*

*I would argue that the Belizean teacher is much more resourceful than the Canadian teacher and frequently is able to make something out of nothing. In fact, participants in this study gave me new meaning to the term “pack rat”. Through my eyes of a Canadian researcher, so much of what they collected seemed useless: coke bottles to measure collected rainwater, bottle caps, small rocks and used batteries to practice counting, string and ribbon from packaging for art projects. I was told that the more experienced teachers were the ones who were the best collectors and most creative with the limited resources. Younger teachers expected proper supplies and materials for all lessons and had more difficulty locating items from their environment to use in class. It seems to me that this could be a generational phenomenon and not necessarily country specific. Many of my student teachers over the years have been challenged to think creatively when planning a lesson and expect to find all their answers in the supply room or teacher guide book.*

*I have come to realize that problems I encounter in my professional life pale in comparison to those lived by the teachers in Belize. I have grown to admire them tremendously in their efforts to deliver relevant and meaningful lessons to their students. I remember back to my application form to join TFABB. I was asked to write two consecutive lesson plans in an academic area of my choice, using no supplies whatsoever. I laughed at the question, thinking that this was some kind of joke. I eventually put together two math lessons: **counting** by pacing my walking strides and **estimating** by gauging distances between trees. It wasn't until I arrived in Belize and*

*spent some time in a remote village near the Guatemalan border, that I saw the relevance of the lessons. What struck me most, though, wasn't the lack of supplies but the ease with which the teachers could teach like that. I am sure they would have loved some more supplies and materials, but the truth was, they were doing fine without them. They were already problem solvers, adaptors, recyclers, and creative thinkers. It was content and teaching strategies they longed to add to their repertoire.*

*The connections I have made with the people in Belize are powerful. The teachers I have had the pleasure to work with are inspiring. Many are driven beyond what I could have ever imagined and truly desired to transform their communities. Nalla's motivation came from somewhere deeper than I, a teacher from the minority world, could ever fathom. She wanted nothing more than to provide meaningful education to the children in her village. To her, education provided the much needed opportunity to escape poverty.*

I chose the teaching profession so that I could help the people in my own village – the village where I was born. My mother is illiterate and wanted me to be a teacher so that I could help our own people so that they would not become like her. I want to make a change. With my contributions, I think that I can help to make our country more developed. (Nalla)

*Nalla's altruistic purpose for teaching, and about life, is more than admirable. She reminds me, more than anyone, why I am a teacher and the incredible responsibility inherent in my role.*

## Chapter 5 – Conclusion

The intent of this study was to explore, from the perspective of a Canadian teacher who volunteers in Belize, the lived realities of primary school teachers in Toledo. The study was written in such a way as to promote thoughtful and reflective dialogue between all those involved in the development of teacher knowledge, through the represented realities of teachers in this rural area of Belize. Bullough and Gitlin (1989) suggest that the purpose of dialogue differs from that of talk as its intention is to develop a shared understanding of a subject in an atmosphere characterized by a respectful relationship among equals. It begins with a tacit sense of relevance in which the participants think the discourse is important. I recognize that the researched voices in this study speak from different perspectives with different intentions and conventions. The voices, however, each have a part in determining the course of critical dialogue, directed toward a path of improvement.

Three distinct voices can be heard in this work: the academic, the local teacher in Toledo and the outsider. The realist tale features the academic's voice as rich interview data related to the teachers' learning is connected to existing literature. The voice of the Toledo teacher is featured in the creative ethnography as the story describes the professional journey most teachers take in the district. The voice of the colonial teacher from the "outside" is featured in the confessional tale as I attempt to make sense of my role as an outsider trying to gain an insider's view. I not only hope that all three voices will be heard, understood and appreciated, but that all three will come to know one another as they connect through respectful dialogue. Sparkes (1991) refers to this polyvocality as necessary if all parties are to leave episodes of conversation intellectually

enhanced. Together the highlighted voices answer the research questions, illustrate the implications associated with the findings and set paths for future work. The following questions structured the study: (1) *How does the development of teachers' knowledge occur in rural communities of the majority world country of Belize?* (2) *What kind of impact has the Teacher for a Better Belize (TFABB) "Literacy Coaches Program" had on the development of teachers' knowledge in Toledo, Belize?*

This dissertation is like a puzzle. The research represents the work I have done to identify the different shapes, sizes and colours of the pieces, or voices, in the puzzle. As previously stated in this dissertation, I have no right or responsibility to finish the puzzle, as the final pieces will be placed by those living the reality in Belize. Based on the confidences shared with me by the educational community in Toledo, however, I have been permitted an outsider's piece of the puzzle. Temporarily significant, this piece may help show teachers, administrators and policy makers in Belize how the puzzle might fit together now as a guide for the future.

### **A Realist Map of Teacher Learning: The Voice of the Academic**

The academic's voice represents teacher learning in Toledo on a literal level. Using carefully selected quotes from local teachers, the realist tale provides a road map of teachers' professional learning in Toledo. Although this map shows that teachers gain professional knowledge FOR practice, IN practice and OF practice, they rely heavily on the personal practical knowledge gained in the classroom before and after they attend formal schooling. Knowledge developed as part of teacher education programs happens when teachers are willing, ready and able to attend such institutions. Much learning also occurs informally among peers and family members. For the purpose of this section,

academics are referred to as those involved in research and teacher education in and out of Belize, as well as education officials within the country of Belize.

### ***Teacher Knowledge FOR Practice***

Teachers in Toledo gain knowledge for practice in the University setting, at formal workshops or by doing their own research. As most teachers attend University after teaching for some time, they are able to contextualize what they learn and engage in the process in a “need to know” sort of way. They learn about subject matter content, teaching methodologies and learning theories. They bring work to share with classmates and often discuss their own teaching practices, as many attend classes in the evenings after teaching all day. Teachers also gain knowledge for practice by attending workshops that are facilitated by local, national or international organizations. In addition, there is a district education office in Punta Gorda, with a fully functioning computer lab, where teachers can access various teaching materials and resources. This knowledge for practice will continue to be an essential component in any teacher’s journey in learning to teach. For the Toledo teacher, however, it is not the mode of learning that produces the highest return.

Of significance in this study is the practical experience Toledo teachers gain prior to attending formal teacher education programs. Such experience has been beneficial for many of the teachers as their need to know is heightened by their previous classroom experience. The timing and length of such practical experience is beginning to be explored by some minority world teacher educators. Programs across the United States and Canada specifically have been evolving to include more practical experience in their programs. Some have even been contemplating a practical component *before* beginning

formal teacher education (Russell, 1995). I am not assuming that Belize was looked to as a model for new programs, but the link is very interesting nevertheless. At the very least, it gives some degree of legitimacy to the practical knowledge developed in practice by teachers in Toledo, deeming them anything but empty vessels when finally attending formal schooling. Further legitimacy, however, will come through debate with others about various approaches taken. In time, such knowledge might be labeled as professional knowledge that can help shape the educational system in the district.

### ***Teacher Knowledge IN Practice***

Although not surprising, it is significant to note that teacher learning in Toledo is similar to other parts of the world in that teaching is best learned through the act of being a teacher. Participants in this study describe this phenomenon, claiming they have learned most about teaching from the act of teaching. Immersion into a teaching position can be an overwhelming experience for any teacher in the world. For the teacher in Toledo, however, there has likely been limited preparation for such a venture, resulting in a genuine “sink or swim” environment. These teachers formulate understandings about teaching based on the interaction of what they already know and what they are faced with in the classroom. Most in the profession embrace this challenge and understand it to be a viable, traditional and respected means of learning to teach. Teaching is, to a great extent, uncertain and spontaneous and develops in response to everyday classroom situations. Teacher learning happens in context as teachers construct knowledge through trial and error and deliberate reflection (Navarro & Verdisco, 2000; Munby et al., 2001).

The significance of the extensive practical knowledge that teachers gain in-service should not be overlooked. This practical knowledge is critical in their journey to

becoming a teacher and needs to be valued as such. The fact that neither teachers nor educational leaders in Toledo have identified this knowledge as being valuable or valid, is in itself, a concern. Perhaps it is because they exist in a “society of institutions” as one of the participants described, where having a piece of paper showing that you know something is the only way to make your knowledge count. Clandinin (1986) concurs, explaining that teachers are not commonly credited with knowledge gained from their experience.

Few would argue that practical experience is an essential element in learning to teach. This type of learning, however, is often complemented by learning outside the classroom. Nalla, a participant in this study, admits that before professional development workshops her repertoire of teaching methodologies was limited. Specifically, she identifies TFABB workshops as being valuable in helping her to improve her practice.

In the beginning of my teaching career, I felt happy but at the same time sad. I liked what I was doing, but there were some times that my students just couldn't understand what it was that I was trying to teach them...I knew the content areas quite well, but I did not know enough strategies to teach the content to the children...My teaching practice has changed over the years mostly due to the professional development workshops I have attended – especially the TFABB one that is held every summer where I have learned many successful methods and strategies for teaching. (Nalla)

Korthagen et al., (2006) also support the notion of teacher learning outside the classroom and caution against discounting the necessary application of teaching practices to grounded learning theories. They argue that too much practical experience, without the

necessary theory to provide contextualization, may result in teachers who have merely learned “the tricks of the trade, without much deepening through theory” (p.1021). Other knowledge gained outside the classroom is that which is passed down from one generation to the next in Toledo. Although this knowledge is most often an asset to a teacher’s repertoire, in some cases it fails to take the changing educational climate into consideration. This gives further credence to the recommendation that teachers collaborate about their teaching practices, as they define the relevance and ethical implications associated with their teacher culture.

### ***Teacher Knowledge OF Practice***

Knowledge of practice is only beginning to be explored by teachers in Toledo. The in-services designed as part of the Literacy Coaching Program illustrate that teachers are starting to understand and interpret their own learning. Specifically, the collaboration of ideas and sharing of students’ work is evidence that teachers are starting to analyze their own practice at a deeper and more constructive level. Anne explains the discussion that occurred at one in-service as teachers compared a teaching strategy.

...we were asked to bring samples of student work....this encouraged us to try the activities so that we had something to share at the in-services. This way we could see if the different teachers experienced the same thing as we did, when they tried the same activity. So this was a good way to share our lessons and see how things were going back in our different classes. (Anne)

By forming this community of learners teachers are becoming more reflective practitioners and in effect, knowers of the known (Fenstermacher, 1994). As facilitators of the in-services, literacy coaches are also improving their craft by working closely with

their peers. Simon explains, “By actually teaching the concepts and strategies myself (as a coach), I learned them very thoroughly and was able to take them back to my classroom.”

Teacher learning as part of the Literacy Coaching Program has implications for the rest of Belize as well as other majority world countries. With more children attending primary school worldwide than ever before, the task of formally educating all teachers pre-service is daunting and unrealistic. As outlined previously in this dissertation, alternative methods of educating teachers such as India’s teacher empowerment project and the Microcentros in Chile are already in place in many regions of the majority world. As the dominant discourse around teacher learning in the majority world is *in-service* education, it is hoped that the Literacy Coaching Program could be a model for other parts of Belize and the majority world. Such social constructivist methods of teacher learning may, in fact, become the norm in such parts of the world. One could argue that such learning for teachers anywhere in the world is beneficial. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) suggest that knowledge of practice is transformative in nature as teachers challenge and explore their own interpretations, ideologies and practices. This exchange of narratives between groups who have similar intents and/or challenges in their own teaching is a critical element in learning for teachers.

### **Empathy for Teacher Learning in Creative Ethnography: The Voice of the Local Teacher**

The Toledo teacher’s voice represents teacher learning on an interpretive level. The creative ethnography draws attention to the voice of the local teacher in Toledo through “Maria”, as I *interpret* her lived reality. Inherent in ethnography is the moral

obligation to represent the truth. It wasn't long before I became keenly aware there was more going on with respect to teacher learning than could be viewed on a map outlining various learning opportunities. The story bears witness to the challenges teachers face in their own learning through the professional, and personal, journey they take as educators. Of all who have the potential to be affected by this research, it is my hope that the local teachers, working on the front lines day after day, are the ones who will find the most truth in this piece. Conjuring up images of dangerous battle spaces in war, the term "front lines" for Toledo teachers reflects the intimate yet challenging work they do in multigrade classrooms with limited supplies, as they attempt to deliver quality education to students in their care. I have attempted to capture the reality of teachers as a whole, in the hopes that readers will be able to connect, and possibly even empathize, with local teachers. Providing such consequences in the minds of the readers may be the catalytic validity necessary for change. Framed within an interpretive paradigm, where multiple truths are represented, I feel confident that each teacher will be able to locate himself or herself within the story.

### ***On the Front Line: The Need to Be Heard***

The voice of the Toledo teacher, more than any other voice, needs to be heard. The teachers indicated to me time and time again that they are rarely listened to. As alluded to in a previous chapter, some teachers felt that because I was telling their stories they might be heard; that so called experts from the outside were more likely to be listened to than local teachers. Although this is not a promising thought, I am grateful I was able to bring their realities to light. It is my hope that the telling of their stories will be the impetus needed to have their stories heard more directly in the future.

As “Maria” highlights, teachers in Toledo often begin careers as teenagers faced with a variety of challenges not always apparent to those not living their reality. Most teach in Catholic schools where personal, as well as professional lives are monitored. They begin teaching in isolated and remote villages, equipped with little or no formal preparation. The significance of this is illustrated in the content taught and methodology the teachers used early in their careers. Most often, teachers would end up teaching subject matter they felt confident with. I remember conversations with participants in this study. One explained that she focused much more on reading than writing as she just did not know how to teach creative writing to six year olds effectively. Another participant explained that although he taught most of the required concepts in math, he steered clear of rational numbers as he did not have a firm grasp on them himself. In terms of methodology, teachers employed methods similar to the ways in which they were taught: very teacher centered. In this case, the implications of such methodology point to the practice of perpetuating authoritative teaching practices.

Part of the teachers’ struggle in providing relevant quality education to their students lies in the roadblocks they face in their own professional development. With demanding jobs in geographically isolated areas, teachers are challenged to find either the time or place to engage in meaningful discussions about their practice, or to attend formal education programs at centralized institutions. Despite the obstacles associated with their own learning, teachers in Toledo do eventually find ways to learn by seeking out mentors, working with peers or attending formal schooling. They talk with family members who are also teachers, plan lessons with colleagues and often ask for help from

mentor teachers or principals in their schools. Olivia, a participant in this study, explained that she counted on her peers for help early in her career.

I would ask them “How do you do this or that?” Then I would go back to my class to try it. It was helpful to work with my peers. This is how I have learned a lot over the years. I made a lot of mistakes, but learned from them. My peers have always been good for me. (Olivia)

To further their own formal education, teachers must either travel to Punta Gorda in the evenings for classes or temporarily resign from their positions and go back to school. In some cases there is limited funding for such ventures. In most cases it means that teachers, who have been used to a steady pay cheque, must go without money for a period of time to become certified. Although not an inviting proposition, many will eventually do so as it raises their status, increases their pay cheques and helps them gain what they perceive to be necessary knowledge for their profession.

In part, the aim of this story is to help connect the educational administrators to the local teachers, especially the ones in the most isolated and remote villages. As district leaders only occasionally make delivery trips to rural schools, there is little discussion about what really goes on in the classrooms. I remember riding in a four wheel drive truck out to one of the most remote villages in Toledo with one of the educational officials in the district. We brought sheets of zinc to a school that already had a solid roof. As it is likely most educational leaders have, at some point, lived in a rural village, I wondered why we didn't bring school supplies instead. The physical structure of the school appeared to be more important than the learning going on inside the walls of the building. The teachers on the front line are rarely asked for their opinion or input. I argue

that there are no better people to express the stories of teacher learning in Toledo, than those living them day in and day out. At an educational celebration in June of 2009, the new Minister of Education, Patrick Faber, had some very promising words to share in regard to his connectedness to the education system operating throughout the country.

Since becoming your Minister of Education I have toured schools throughout the length and breath of this country. I have been to the front lines of education in Belize. I have met the people and have seen the evidence to validate these statistics. I have visited schools like George Town High School in the south where children sit under thatched roof structure with no walls for a classroom. I have visited areas in Toledo where children go to school with no shoes. I have travelled to and from villages on the very road that students must journey to attend school many miles away from as early last two or three in the morning. I have seen overcrowded classrooms. I have seen children whose meal for the day at school is one or two corn tortillas and salt...I have met teachers whose only qualifications are a high school certificate... (San Pedro Daily, 2009, p.1)

On the surface it appears that the new Education Minister is indeed in touch with the system of education which he manages. Time will tell if his reported familiarity with the educational landscape will lead to improved educational opportunities for teachers and students. If “Maria” had the opportunity to speak with the Education Minister, she would likely ask him what he is presently doing about the situation, why her village is still awaiting electricity and why four students in her class have to share the same text book.

One particular part of this research process that did allow teachers to be heard was the interview process. Several participants agreed the interview process was of value to

them as learners. They had never taken the time to look back on their careers and think about why they chose the career, the different experiences they had had or how they arrived where they were today. I could sense their appreciation for someone taking the time to listen to them tell their stories. I would argue that on one level it was therapeutic for the teachers to speak with me. For some, they simply enjoyed the “trip down memory lane,” never really taking the time to realize all that they had accomplished in their careers. For others the interview discussions provided the time and space for them to speak about issues that had been frustrating them for some time. Although I could not promise any solutions to their problems, I sensed they felt much better just being able to voice their concerns. Two of the local teachers in this study specifically expressed their gratitude in being part of the interviews and research process. One explained the time he spent during our interviews allowed him to reflect on his career in a way he had never done before. He appreciated the challenge in methodically retracing the steps he had taken on his journey as an educator. Another participant reported she was happy to have shared with me as now she now felt that at least one voice was heard. In the creative ethnographic story, “Maria” speaks for all these teachers, and more, working in this rural region of Belize.

### ***Strength in Numbers: Momentum Builds***

The Literacy Coaching Program was designed with local teachers’ ownership and sustainability in mind. It functions as a community of learners unlike any other in the country; teachers share with one another and learn to take responsibility for their own learning as professionals. Committees have been set up, coaches selected and in-services realized. Much learning has occurred with both literacy coaches as well as workshop

participants. Teachers are beginning to take risks with their learning and transform their practice. Mary, a literacy coach in the study, describes this phenomenon as she coached a colleague at a recent summer workshop.

I have seen the transformation of some teachers, from being resistant in the beginning to cooperating in the end...one teacher was very resistant in the beginning....but by the end he said that he was happy that I was patient with him about the “small moment” (writing strategy) and that he could now go back to his classroom and use it. (Mary)

Teachers in Toledo are indirectly demanding professional autonomy within their community of educators by, for example, making decisions as to the location and content of work sessions. Teachers in Toledo would do well to ride on this wave, as they have created considerable momentum and appear to care about their own learning.

The significance of this is paramount. For virtually all its existence, the education system in Toledo has been controlled by someone other than local educators: British adventurers, Jamaican educators and outside organizations. In addition, there has long been a tacit controlling force - the authoritarian practices of the Catholic Church. One of the participants in this study identified this perpetual control as being responsible for stifling teachers for years and referred to the Catholic school management, specifically, as a form of colonialism. The recent increase in local leadership and teacher confidence, however, has been a serious and compelling shift. I suggest it will not only help their voices to be heard, but also help them to move forward toward ultimate liberation. My experience in Toledo informs me that teachers have always known what they want (or more specifically don't want) but have struggled with how to achieve it. It is my hope

that Toledo teachers understand that remaining unified as a group will increase their strength, helping them to achieve what they desire. Their local professional associations, for example, can help their collective voices be heard, informing the government what they need in order to provide quality relevant education to students in their care.

### **Reflections of Teacher Learning in the Confessional Tale: The Voice of the Outsider**

The confessional tale represents teacher learning in Toledo on a reflective level. Based on my personal reflections of the research, it is where I could “pull it all together” and make meaning of my role in the process. There is much to be said about if and how an outsider fits in an insider’s world and if reciprocal learning can in fact, be realized. Throughout this process I experienced a variety of challenges as well as a wide range of emotions. In the end, however, I believe I interpreted the teachers’ realities with accuracy, integrity and honesty. I learned much more than I ever thought possible including the realization that teachers in Toledo and teachers in Canada are much more similar than they are different. As previously mentioned, I have employed confession tales in three different ways: to critique the research process including methodology and ethical issues, to reflect on the realist tales as they pertain to my own learning and teaching practice, and to discuss things I might have done differently throughout the process.

#### ***The View from the Outside***

The view from the outside has been thought provoking, frustrating and inspirational. The educational realities lived out in Toledo have made me think. The

misplacement of power displayed by almost all I came in contact with was frustrating. The genuine desire of local teachers to improve the lives of villagers inspired me.

Despite my extensive world travel, I proved to be somewhat naïve in the early stages of this project. As time went on and discussions ensued, I began to become brutally aware of the realities associated with teacher learning in Toledo. The valuable knowledge about teaching that teachers had did not seem to count. Although respected by the general population, there seemed to be a lack of respect toward teachers from educational leaders in the district. They were moved from village to village to teach, usually with limited supplies and materials. They learned foreign languages just to be able to understand their students. They lived and worked in a tenuous situation that could be changed at any time by religious management. It was difficult for me to grasp that their education system was operating in such a primitive manner for the 21st century.

The level of respect I received throughout the process was unwarranted. I continue to wonder if the perceived power of one over the other will ever be erased. I argue, however, that this phenomenon should not discourage outsiders from working with insiders in the majority world. It does propose, however, that outsiders become educated before commencing such work. If they fail to do so, the risk of inadvertently further oppressing the already marginalized strongly exists.

I sincerely hope that the implications of my role as an outsider in this research will have limited, if any, negative effects. Although I am aware of some good resulting from this process, I am also aware that at times, I may have “over-stayed my welcome” so to speak. Specifically in the spring of 2008, 18 months after the data was collected, I made phone calls to interviewees and sent questionnaires to those I could not reach by

telephone. At the time I felt it was necessary information as there were gaps in my understanding. Although I received no negative feedback, I sensed that data collection needed to come to an end.

The view from the outside was also deeply inspiring. My work allowed me to bear witness to the genuine thirst for knowledge some of the teachers have. Despite being faced with personal and professional challenges unimaginable in my teaching world, teachers, for the most part, understand that knowledge indeed equates to power and opportunity. They are deeply committed to educating themselves as well as the children in their communities. Teachers in Toledo realize the challenges inherent in gaining knowledge, for themselves as well as their students, but are also keenly aware of its value as a ticket out of poverty.

Of additional significance in this research, as viewed from the outside, was the gradual transition of my position in this process. In the early stages my focus was on TFABB and the impact our organization had on teachers and teacher learning in the district. As time went on, however, I sensed a decentering of the position of colonial privilege – not so much in the way I was treated, but in how I felt. It was a humbling experience to say the least, realizing that the core of teacher learning was about the teacher, not an outside group. Local teachers were bright, articulate educators who had accumulated an incredible amount of knowledge long before their introduction to TFABB.

### *Personal Learning*

When I began this project I genuinely believed that the work I was doing would in some way assist the teachers in Toledo with their development as professionals. I wanted

to tell their stories in the hopes that people would listen. I gave little thought to my own learning and how this study might affect my own practice, or the practice of teachers in the minority world. Although my supervisor encouraged me to seek relevance to my own learning, I most often dismissed the idea. My intent was to assist the teachers in Toledo. For most of this study, I maintained that stance. It wasn't until I was deep in the process of writing that I admittedly began to feel as though I was learning something about teaching.

Learning most often occurred when I was faced with challenges with the writing. Much reflection, and even some relearning, was necessary at these crucial points. One clear example involved the analysis of learning theories and how they applied to one's teaching practice. By plotting out the forms of learning that existed for teachers in Toledo, I was able to associate specific learning theories to their behaviours. This forced me to think about my own practice, how I learned as well as how I taught. Reading also provided me with rich learning opportunities. After collecting and reading more than one hundred articles for my literature review, I initially struggled to make sense of it and connect it to the research. As I found myself deep in the writing process, however, I again began to make sense of the data and make connections to the literature. When rereading articles, it was as if I was reading a brand new article; my lens had changed. The words on the page did not change as they were static and fixed. It was I, the reader, who moved in and out of the text – slowly and methodically in the beginning, but with increasing eagerness near the end. This made me wonder if my colleagues at home had opportunities to experience such transformative learning. Creating the time and space for this to occur

would help teachers anywhere to gain a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of their practices.

As I continued through the writing process, I became a firm believer in Miles and Huberman's (1994) contention that the writing process *is* the analysis and the thinking, rather than the reporting of results. For me, the writing *was* the research. Although the most difficult part of the entire project, the writing is where the research truly began and my learning flourished. As Block (1988) describes

To live is to read texts, but to be alive is to write them...To write a text is to weave a conception of the world and depends upon your ability to recognize, manipulate and create codes, and to produce from them a fabric which answers to our situation at the moment. (p.23)

If writing truly *is* the research, then at the very least this piece of writing needs to be shared with local educators in Belize if in fact any improvement in teacher learning is to be realized. I would be lying if I said I didn't feel somewhat vulnerable in sharing the research. I sincerely hope that I got the teachers' stories "right enough". I can only hope that because most of the participants were also friends, or at the very least acquaintances, understanding will be granted for any perceived inaccuracies or misrepresentations I may have made. After all, as previously described, this work is my interpretation of the teachers' interpretation of their reality.

### **Future Work: Voices Moving Forward**

It is hoped that all voices will now be able to locate, understand and come to know one another. It is possible for these pieces of the puzzle to engage in meaningful

and respectful dialogue as they are fastened to complete the puzzle. Each voice can begin by acknowledging and accepting the legitimacy of the others.

### *Setting a Path for the Academic*

Throughout this study, I have referred to educational administrators as both managers and leaders, yet they are clearly not synonymous. If district administrators in Toledo consider themselves leaders as well as managers, they have critical roles to play in the development of teacher learning in their district. I suggest that two important areas of focus are listening to their teachers as part of respectful dialogue and exploring ways to create the time and space for teachers to collaborate. Both suggestions include professional collaboration, a critical element in teacher learning.

Listening to the teachers and being genuinely attentive to what they have to say might open up the formerly narrow lines of communication between management and workers on the front line. Educational leaders in Toledo, for example, may gain a deeper understanding of the role of teachers and challenges they face. Similarly, teachers might view the role of management in a different light. Sparkes (1991) suggests that “In order to give a just hearing to others the listener needs to be open to their views; she or he must be prepared to listen with respect to distant and alien voices.” (p.106). As I alluded to in the opening of this chapter, the voices in this research may indeed hold contrasting obligations and intentions, and indeed may be somewhat alien to each other. It can be assumed, for example, that a beginning teacher in rural Toledo may not share the same priorities as the Education Officer living in Punta Gorda Town. I suggest that the management in Toledo take a close look, however, at the genuine lived realities of

teachers in remote villages, especially teaching principals who consistently attempt to live up to unrealistic expectations.

If educational leaders in Toledo want to improve their education system, they must begin with the teachers. Respected, competent, happy teachers have the potential to help foster similar qualities in their students. Recognizing and appreciating the work that teachers do is critical. I am reminded of the long hours and hard work the literacy coaches put forth each year as they attempted to transform teacher learning in their district. I am aware of no recognition or special credit received for their incredible efforts. They gave up valuable family time in the evenings to work with their peers as well as North American volunteers to prepare for workshops and in-services. Efforts of this nature would surely not go unnoticed in the minority world; rather they would likely be handsomely paid. Because such collaborative work is a critical role of the teacher leader, I suggest that district leaders find ways to release teachers from their duties to work with their peers on a regular basis. Services provided by teacher leaders would be of higher quality if they could have time to prepare and work with teachers as part of their regular working day. Some type of compensation for the literacy coaches, as well as other teacher leaders in the district, is in order. By recognizing their efforts, teachers in such roles will understand that their work is valued. I suggest that educational leaders in Toledo encourage such professional autonomy among teachers and come to realize that a teacher's worth equates to more than just detailed weekly schemes or regular attendance at the local church.

Teachers would benefit greatly from more time to collaborate about their practice. I understand that in some schools time is provided for group planning. I argue that

although this is useful, it is not the same as collaborating about teaching practice. Wilson and Berne (1999) suggest that the most effective professional development for teachers involves the teachers as active learners in the process. Content should be organic in the sense that ideas are directly related to the needs of a particular school and its teachers. The common thread in such development is that it is the teachers who design, implement and evaluate the sessions. They learn collaboratively in such networks that provide opportunities to examine and reflect on teaching and share experiences associated with efforts to develop new practices (Cochrane-Smith & Lytle, 1999).

One specific example relates to the new language arts curriculum in Belize. Like all new initiatives, it required teachers to learn. The time allotted for this learning, however, was minimal and took place over the summer holidays. I was told that teachers in other districts had much more time to explore the new curriculum than teachers in Toledo did. In addition, it was North American volunteers working with TFABB who, along with local presenters, facilitated workshops aimed at explaining the new curriculum. I can honestly say that this process made me feel very awkward. I did not feel prepared to show teachers from a foreign country how to implement their *own* curriculum. I believe this is one area that TFABB, with the encouragement of district leaders, stepped out of line by becoming involved in an area that was not theirs. In effect, TFABB's good reputation was used to legitimize the curriculum. The curriculum implementation sessions were very quick and came with little follow up for local teachers. Fortunately, the sessions were co-facilitated by local literacy coaches who would remain in the district and likely be available for any clarification required.

Leaders of professions around the world expect their members to become more skilled over time and provide opportunities for such learning to occur. This is true not only for complex professions such as law or medicine, but also for professions assumed to require less training (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999). Former president of the American federation of teachers Albert Shanker claimed (as cited in Stigler & Hiebert, 1999) that Saturn, for example, introduced a new process for building cars which provided 92 hours per year of re-education for each employee.

It is ironic that a bunch of people whose business is building cars understand so well the importance of educating their employees, whereas people in education seem to assume that teachers and other school staff will be able to step right into a new way of doing things with little or no help. If it takes...92 hours a year per employee to make a better automobile, it will take that and more to make better schools. (p. 33-34)

If the Ministry of Education in Belize provides teachers with a new curriculum, it would be wise to allow them to learn the curriculum first. Collaborative education sessions with peers to review the curriculum and test it out would be highly recommended.

Academics are also considered as those who conduct research. As noted earlier, most research on teachers' generation and acquisition of knowledge has been conducted by academics from minority world countries and is deeply rooted in a North American construct. To gain a better understanding of teacher learning in the majority world, however, more research must be done in such regions, ideally by local researchers and local teachers. Penados (2000) believes that the government in Belize should stop hiring foreign consultants to solve educational problems in the country and that Belize should

develop its own culture of research by involving local teachers and teacher educators in the process. They understand the problems that plague schools and teachers much better than any outside person or agency. Shahidul Alam, the Bangladeshi photojournalist, scholar and founder of “Majority World” supports this principle. He explains that although 90% of photographs taken from the majority world are taken by photographers from the minority world, only majority world photographers can truly depict the reality of their own world. I suggest the same is true in teacher education research.

It is promising that a significant portion of the research on teacher learning in Belize has indeed been conducted by native Belizeans. Local academics must continue to produce such valuable information and make it accessible to both the academic community as well as practicing teachers throughout the country. If local teachers know that native Belizeans are conducting informative and enriching research that is making a difference, it is likely they will begin to appreciate it and accept such forms of local knowledge as being legitimate. This may create a ripple effect, helping them realize the value of their own local knowledge and ways of knowing.

Although there is a substantial amount of literature related to the education system in Belize, only a few of the studies focus on teacher education. The ones that do exist emphasize formal training of teachers in the university setting rather than situated learning in the context of teaching or learning by sharing knowledge at professional workshops. Further exploration into this type of learning is required so that educational leaders can better understand the practical teacher knowledge that many teachers bring to a teacher education program. As previously stated, formal teacher education has its place. The fact remains, however, that many teachers will begin their careers with little or no

formal training, yet also have the right to learn. In addition, those who have received formal teacher education would greatly benefit from quality and relevant in-service opportunities to increase their knowledge and hone their craft.

Academics working with teacher education programs in Belize find themselves in an ever changing world. One constant that must be considered however, is the practical experience gained by teachers before attending formal teacher education programs. Although it is the intent of each individual district to hire fully certified teachers in their primary schools, it is far from realized in the remote region of Toledo. Teachers will continue to be assigned to teaching positions with little, if any, formal education. Education leaders in Belize must continue to recognize and appreciate the knowledge teachers accumulate before they begin formal education. University programs must continue to be designed with these practical experiences at the heart, focusing on what the teachers already know as opposed to knowledge that should be taught to them (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000). They must consider that learning to teach in such social constructivist ways is a viable means to learn to teach. It would be a formidable challenge to harness this practical knowledge so it can be shared with other teachers and added to what academics commonly refer to as the professional knowledge base of teaching (Munby, et al., 2001).

Those involved in the design and implementation of formal teacher education must also continue to consider the needs of indigenous people, specifically their languages. As described by Newport (2004), children schooled in rural areas of Toledo often repeat their first year of primary school, as they are simply unable to understand the language of instruction employed. Although many educational authorities, as well as

teachers, support some kind of bilingual or translingual education for early primary students in the region, teachers must be able to speak and understand the language their students are using for this to be realized. More initiatives directed at assisting teachers with this challenge need to be explored. By including components specific to English language learners, in both pre-service as well as in-service education programs, teachers would be better equipped to provide appropriate education for students of diverse language backgrounds.

Finally, the academic in Belize would do well to create more accessible graduate programs for teachers in the country. Graduates of such programs could work with cohorts in their districts by providing the social and intellectual context in which local teachers could inquire about their own practices in their own classrooms (Cochrane-Smith and Lytle, 1999). Such action research with local teachers as participants in the process illustrates a community of learners working toward the development of professional knowledge to improve the human condition in their educational communities.

### ***Setting a Path for the Toledo Teacher***

Toledo teachers should be encouraged to continue to take responsibility for their own learning by seeking out alternative means to develop professionally. Collaborating with peers, seeking out mentors and attending locally developed workshops will help them to gain valuable knowledge to use in their practice. I encourage all teachers to share their knowledge and understandings of teaching with fellow educators, policy makers as well as the general public.

With local teacher leadership on the rise, it would be wise for Toledo teachers to unite as a group and travel with this momentum. By continuing to become involved in leadership projects in their district, teachers are demonstrating ownership of their knowledge and learning. For those who have no interest in becoming leaders as such, they can still play a role by respecting and appreciating the knowledge of experienced local teachers and encouraging and empathizing with those taking on any leadership roles. Teachers are encouraged to be active members of any professional association that may exist in their district.

When provided the opportunity, I suggest that Toledo teachers engage in any research that has the potential to improve the system of education in which they work. As was indicated in this study, teachers felt empowered when they were able to tell their own stories. I encourage them to continue to tell their stories either directly or indirectly through others and see *themselves* as agents of change. If teachers are to be actively engaged in their own knowledge construction and development as professionals, their voices must be heard.

### ***Setting a Path for the Outsider***

As I reflect on my work in Toledo, I am aware that I am one of many organizations from both inside and outside the tiny country attempting to lend a helping hand in the field of education. I believe that Black (2002) captured the essence of development assistance best by claiming that it is something done *with* someone and not *to* someone. Top down projects emphasizing expert and novice relationships will do little good in Toledo. Outsiders working in the area must be cognizant of where and how they

are doing their work. They must understand the culture in which they are working, including how the people live, work and learn.

The future role of the outsider in Toledo is somewhat nebulous. Although it is hopeful to assume that teacher learning will at some point outgrow the assistance of outside organizations, I see outsiders working in Belize indefinitely. Donations of supplies and materials are still needed. Guidance with respect to teacher learning is still appreciated. It may be time, however, for local educational leaders to take a more direct role in selecting the organizations to work in their district and designing ways in which they can assist with issues specific to the district and its communities. I can attest to the relationship that TFABB has built with Toledo over time which now includes direct input from local educational leaders as well as teachers. This, however, is not always the case with an outside organization. Effective work by outside organizations amounts to more than just consulting locals or encouraging their input. It requires a shift in thinking of those coming from the outside. I realize of course, that a shift of this nature takes considerable time. In fact, as described earlier, it was my extensive time spent interacting with the locals, followed by serious and deliberate reflection, which provided the impetus for me to reposition my thinking.

As a volunteer with many years experience in Toledo, as well as a researcher making recommendations from this study, I feel obligated to comment on the necessary attitude an outsider should bring to such regions of the world. Throughout my years in the region I have experienced individuals from outside NGOs as well as the Peace Corps, who display attitudes of superiority. They believe they have come to Toledo to fix certain problems and operate from a place of power and control. Those who prepare such

individuals to volunteer in Toledo would benefit from encouraging their volunteers to tap into the relevant local knowledge that already exists and realize that each person involved in the process brings necessary knowledge to the development table. In order to be effective, outsiders must be more than just “well meaning” transmitters of knowledge. They must work alongside local people to gain a deeper understanding of the culture in which they are working.

### **Final Thoughts**

In conclusion, I am reminded that as with all research, this study represents merely a snapshot in time. With the swift passage of time and the experiences of life, the educational world in Toledo is in flux. The Greek philosophy Heraclitus said: “No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man.” This quote implies quite simply, that reality is a process. No two things are exactly alike. No one thing is ever twice the same. Any attempt to define the river by its water content or its stream speed or any other such statistic will fail, because those things are constantly changing. Each and every time I return to Belize, I am stepping into a different river. The people change and I change.

One specific example is the very recent proposal of an amendment to the Education Act, which includes a monumental turn with respect to the management of teachers throughout the country. A committee of 13 people, referred to as the Teaching Services Committee, has been suggested to oversee the employment of all teachers. Implying a more level playing ground for all teachers, the amendment proposes to process teachers into positions using qualification and experience, instead of appointing people to teaching positions. As expected, it is a highly contentious proposal which has

met with considerable opposition from the Catholic Church who currently manage most of the schools in the country. There has long been debate about the control of the Catholic Church in education in Belize. The fact that there is even a proposal on the table pays tribute to the power of this age old debate.

Inevitable continuous change supports the suggestion that all voices involved in the development of teachers' knowledge continue to listen to and learn from one another. The voices speaking in this piece have likely changed repeatedly since the beginning of this project. The relevance of this cannot be overlooked. The more things change, the more the voices have to open up to one another, to understand, empathize and help one another. Despite the significant contributions educational authorities, teacher educators and outside organizations have made to teacher learning in Belize, one voice remains discounted. I argue that no voice is as relevant in teacher learning, than that of the teacher. Ironically, teachers are underrepresented; not in number but in recognition, influence and respect. The intent of this research was to raise the profile of these teachers who hold valuable and legitimate knowledge.

Belize is a recently independent country striving for a place and way of life to call its own. The challenge will be for educational communities to navigate the changing river as they strive to improve educational opportunities. I am reminded of Gregorio Ch'oc's disappointment with previous research in the district, claiming that little ever changed when researchers departed (Twigg, 2006). I am hopeful this project will not meet a similar fate. With my small piece of the puzzle, I have attempted to create a framework for continued learning to occur, which fittingly, may have to begin with the ethnographer's approach to interviews - a conversation with a purpose.

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## APPENDIX A

### Invitation to be a Literacy Coach

**You are Invited...**  
**To Participate in a Curriculum Leadership Program**

The Curriculum Leadership program has been designed through a partnership of the Toledo Regional Education Council and Teaches for a Better Belize - the group that organizes the summer workshop for teachers in Toledo. A need was identified to provide a framework to continue the "good things" learned in the annual summer workshop throughout the school year and to provide more professional development and support for implementing new teaching methods and strategies during the school year. *We need trained and experienced teachers to lead this effort to better implement the training of teachers in our schools and to improve the quality of education in Toledo!*

**Qualifications Necessary to Participate in the Program:**

- Educator who has achieved one of the following trained levels: Masters or graduate work, BA, Level II or Level 2+1
- Willingness to make a two-year commitment and lead three short in-services sessions during the school year

**Benefits:**

- Expand your leadership abilities
- Develop training skills
- Facilitate the sharing of knowledge, skills and teaching strategies among teachers
- Lead teachers in Toledo to a more advanced stage through ongoing professional development
- Transportation and accommodation for teachers from villages will be negotiated
- Be a part of innovative teacher training...moving Toledo teachers to the highest level!

**Required Commitments:**

- Attend initial training workshop July 24 - July 28 where you will increase leadership skills, training skills and curriculum content knowledge
- Lead three short in-service training sessions for the other teachers in your school or cluster (one session per term)
- Serve as a co-presenter with a North American partner during the 2006 (July 31 - August 4) and 2007 (TBA) summer workshops (preferred but not required)

For more information please contact Mr. Assi at the District Education Center. Those interested in participating need to send a brief letter to Mr. Assi at the District Education Center no later than **Friday, January 27, 2005.**

## APPENDIX B

### Suggestions and Recommendations of The Easter Report

- (1) Only in exceptional cases should new schools be aided while the emergency (effects of the hurricane of 1931) lasted and no new schools should be recognized or aided in the vicinity of established schools, unless the size of the population warranted it.
- (2) The age of entry to schools should be raised to six and no grants should be paid in response of children under that age.
- (3) Easy transference of children from one school to another school should be controlled by the introduction of a system of transfer certificates.
- (4) The denominational system of education should be continued.
- (5) Expenditure on education should be revised so that the cost per child is approximately the same in all schools of the same class.
- (6) Block grants should be abolished and salary grants resumed on a fixed minimum scale.
- (7) The individual examination of children should cease and a school leaving certificate instituted.
- (8) The school curriculum and the requirement of the examinations of teacher and pupils should be revised.
- (9) Agents of the "Jeanes Teachers" type, with the rank of Assistant Inspector of Schools, should be appointed to supervise the schools.

- (10) Consideration should be given to the establishing of a “Central Institute” at which provision should be made for the teaching of manual training and domestic science and for a teacher-training center.
- (11) A Director of Education should be appointed whose primary duty should be devising of plans for improving the standard of teaching.
- (12) The constitution and powers of the Board of Education should be revised. Membership should include at least one woman and there should be a teacher representative.
- (13) Regular medical inspection of school children should be introduced.
- (14) If Government was unable to shoulder the burden of a pension scheme, a scheme should be divided whereby the teacher, the denominational authority and the Government would each make a proportional contribution.
- (15) Grants on a 50% basis should be made to enable schools to build up their own libraries.
- (16) There should be a fixed annual grant in aid of the secondary schools on condition that each accepted two pupils as government scholars annually.

## APPENDIX C

## Interview Guide for Teachers who are also Literacy Coaches

- 1) **Please state your name as well as the school and level you presently teach.**
- 2) **How long have you been teaching in Toledo? Elsewhere?**
- 3) **Tell me your story/journey about becoming a teacher.** Why did you choose this as a profession and what has this journey been like?
- 4) **Describe the early years of your teaching.** What are some of the emotions you experienced? What were some of the highs/lows of that time? Did you feel ready to teach?
- 5) **In these early years of your career, did you have a mentor (perhaps a head teacher or principal) of any kind?** If so, what did you learn from this person? If not, do you think you would have benefitted from a mentor? What would have helped you at that time, as a novice teacher?
- 6) **Consider the teacher you have become today. How has your teaching practice changed over the years?** Are you aware of how these changes came about? Do you understand how you learn?
- 7) **Describe your first experience as a participant at a TFABB workshop.** Do you remember what you learned or how you learned?
- 8) **Consider your participation in the 2006 TFABB workshop. Can you provide examples of activities/strategies that were introduced in the workshop that you now use either directly or indirectly in your teaching?** Can you describe what or how you learned these activities/strategies?
- 9) **When do you feel most confident as a teacher?** If possible, describe such a situation. What makes you feel that way? When do you feel most vulnerable? If possible, describe such a situation. What makes you feel that way?
- 10) **Are there events or experiences from your every day life that influence the way in which you teach?** For example, do you think you teach the way you were taught? Has parenting or coaching influenced your teaching?
- 11) **As a teacher, how have you come to know what you know?** In other words, do you know how you have discovered or developed the necessary knowledge/understandings to become an effective teacher?
- 12) **Describe any professional development that occurs in the village in which you work.** In other words, what kind of activities have you been

involved in to explore your own teacher-learning? What pulls people together to make this happen? What barriers exist that prevent this from happening?

- 13) **How has your experience as a coach influenced your own teaching?** Do you feel that you have grown professionally as a result of this process? If so, how? Please provide examples if possible. As a coach, describe some of the rewarding/challenging experiences you faced this past year?
- 14) **Do you think it is possible for this coaching model to continue and be successful in this district?** In other words, do you think this model will lead to anything sustainable in terms of the development of teachers' knowledge in your district? If not, what must occur for sustainability to be realized?
- 15) **Is there anything you would like to add to this conversation that will help me understand how you have developed into the teacher that you are today?** Feel free to provide details about the system of professional development that exists for teachers in the district of Toledo?

## APPENDIX D

## Interview Guide for Teachers who are not Literacy Coaches

- 1) **Please state your name as well as the school and level you presently teach.**
- 2) **How long have you been teaching in Toledo? Elsewhere?**
- 3) **Tell me your story/journey about becoming a teacher.** Why did you choose this as a profession and what has this journey been like?
- 4) **Describe the early years of your teaching.** What are some of the emotions you experienced? What were some of the highs/lows of that time? Did you feel ready to teach?
- 5) **In these early years of your career, did you have a mentor (perhaps a head teacher or principal) of any kind?** If so, what did you learn from this person? If not, do you think you would have benefitted from a mentor? What would have helped you at that time, as a novice teacher?
- 6) **Consider the teacher you have become today. How has your teaching practice changed over the years?** Are you aware of how these changes came about? Do you understand how you learn?
- 7) **Describe your first experience as a participant at a TFABB workshop.** Do you remember what you learned or how you learned?
- 8) **Consider your participation in the 2006 TFABB workshop. Can you provide examples of activities/strategies that were introduced in the workshop that you now use either directly or indirectly in your teaching?** Can you describe what or how you learned these activities/strategies?
- 9) **When do you feel most confident as a teacher?** If possible, describe such a situation. What makes you feel that way? **When do you feel most vulnerable?** If possible, describe such a situation. What makes you feel that way?
- 10) **Are there events or experiences from your every day life that influence the way in which you teach?** For example, do you think you teach the way you were taught? Has parenting or coaching influenced your teaching?
- 11) **As a teacher, how have you come to know what you know?** In other words, do you know how you have discovered or developed the necessary knowledge/understandings to become an effective teacher?

- 12) **Describe any professional development that occurs in the village in which you work.** In other words, what kind of activities have you been involved in to explore your own teacher-learning? What pulls people together to make this happen? What barriers exist that prevent this from happening?
- 13) **Describe your comfort level and participation in the three in-services this past year?** Describe aspects of these sessions that you found to be particularly useful/not useful as a teacher. Do you feel that you have grown professionally as a result of these in-services? If so, how? Please provide examples if possible.
- 14) **Do you think it is possible for this coaching model to continue and be successful in this district?** In other words, do you think this model will lead to anything sustainable in terms of the development of teachers' knowledge in your district? If not, what must occur for sustainability to be realized?
- 15) **Is there anything you would like to add to this conversation that will help me understand how you have developed into the teacher that you are today?** Feel free to provide details about the system of professional development that exists for teachers in the district of Toledo?

## APPENDIX E

## Participant Letter of Consent

**Human Research Ethics  
Adult Consent Form**

July 16, 2007

Dear Participant,

I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Kathy Sanford and Dr. Tim Hopper at the University of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. I am conducting research on the education system in Toledo, Belize – specifically with regard to the acquisition of teacher knowledge and professional development.

I also work as a volunteer with a non-profit organization called “Teachers for a Better Belize” (TFABB), which is a partnership of educators from North America and Belize who work together to improve education in the Toledo school district. We have appreciated your personal involvement in our annual summer workshops and applaud your commitment as a curriculum coach this past year. You have been asked to participate in this study so that we may discover how you develop professional knowledge, as well as the effects of the curriculum coaches’ model implemented in Toledo. It is hoped that this work will help to improve teacher education by exploring ways that teachers can work together and share ideas and knowledge – all the time, empowering the local teachers with whom you work.

Your participation will involve one or more 30-minute audio taped interviews to help me gain a deeper understanding of the lived experience of a teacher and/or a curriculum coach. I may ask you about your involvement in the program as well as details concerning the three teacher in-services that took place during the past school year. If you are unable to meet in Punta Gorda, I will travel to your village to meet with you. Participation in this interview is completely voluntary. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or explanation. You will have the option to remove whole or portions of what you have contributed in interview sessions. I will ask you to sign a release/consent form allowing me to use your data if you withdraw. You will also have the option of withdrawing from the research and having the data collected up until that point, destroyed.

The findings from the interview may be shared with: professors at the University of Victoria, instructors at the University of Belize and stakeholders in the Toledo school district. I will also share the findings of the research with the members of the educational community in Toledo, Belize as well as members of TFABB so that this organization can continue to provide relevant and effective assistance to this region. A summary of these findings will be kept at the district education office in Punta Gorda and be available to all educators in the district. In all reporting of findings your anonymity will be protected.

There are no known inconveniences, or potential risks (physical, social, psychological) involved in participation in this interview. If at any time you feel uncomfortable during the process we can terminate the interview. It is hoped that you may actually benefit from our discussion by thinking about your own development and your colleagues', as teachers in the Toledo district.

It is hoped that as a participant, you may gain a deeper understanding of your own development as a teacher and become aware of how you may be able to organize professional development in the future. This research may also show how teachers in majority world countries can work together to make their voices heard. In addition, teacher trainers at the University of Belize may become informed about the critical challenges local teachers face working in small villages and implement these ideas into their teacher training programs.

Limited confidentiality will be provided. I will request that any participants of group meetings keep the contents of the meetings confidential. The data may be shared with other stakeholders, but changing names will protect anonymity and when appropriate, locality to which they refer, when reporting any data. The notes and any transcripts taken during discussions will be locked in a filing cabinet in Canada and destroyed after five years. The electronic data will be erased and the paper data will be shredded.

You will be able to contact me (Janice Achtem) at (501) 625-0930 – in Belize during the summer of 2007 and (250) 721-4989 – in Canada before and after the summer of 2007 ([jachtem@hotmail.com](mailto:jachtem@hotmail.com)), Dr. Sanford at (250) 721-7762 ([ksanford@uvic.ca](mailto:ksanford@uvic.ca)), Dr. Hopper at (250) 721-8385 ([thopper@uvic.ca](mailto:thopper@uvic.ca)) or the Vice-President of Research at the University of Victoria at (250) 472-4545 with any questions or concerns you may have regarding this research. Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions, including the right to withdraw at any time, and consent to participate in this project.

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Name of Participant

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Signature

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Date

If I withdraw from this research, you may use any data collected up to that point.  
Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

If I withdraw from this research, I would prefer that you destroy any data collected up to that point.  
Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX F

### Template of Belizean primary school teacher lesson plan

Area of Study (subject) Topic/sub-topic Time	Objective (ie. concepts, skills, attitudes) Learning Outcomes/Learning Objectives	Teaching Strategies /Learning Activities	Content (example and key points)	Assessment Strategies	Linkages	Resources, references material, instructional aids	Evaluation

