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Risk or resistance: 
Understanding teachers’ perceptions of risk in professional learning

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TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RISK IN PL

Abstract

Resistance to change is a concept commonly used to frame teachers’ non-engagement in professional learning for change. Despite a wealth of literature aimed at managing resistance to change, the problem of teacher non-engagement in change remains. This research challenges the concept of teacher resistance and instead considers the role of teachers’ perceptions of risk. A risk perception lens underpinned by uncertainty and vulnerability was used to understand teachers’ perceptions of risk in professional learning and their influence on teachers’ actions and ability to learn and change. Additionally, the research aimed to understand how leaders and facilitators made sense of teachers’ responses to professional learning.

A qualitative three-school case study approach, primarily utilising semi-structured interviews of 21 teachers, 14 leaders and 4 facilitators, was used to capture the experiences of teachers as they participated in professional learning. The analysis focused on psychological, social and contextual factors to capture the complex phenomenon of perceptions of risk and risk-related actions.

Teachers formed perceptions of risk connected to similar sources of uncertainty in relation to professional learning events. Teachers who perceived risk experienced variable levels of emotional responses, as feelings of vulnerability. Furthermore, high perceptions of risk impacted negatively on teacher learning that was affected by emotion connected to perceived risk especially when emotion dominated cognition. Teachers’ perceptions of risk decreased in the presence of supportive relationships and increased in their absence. Leaders and facilitators made different sense of teachers’ responses depending on the frames they used. When leaders and facilitators framed non-engagement as resistance to change they positioned responsibility for engagement in change firmly with the teacher. A perception of risk frame broadened responsibility for engagement in change to include those leading the professional learning. The findings informed a risk perception process model linking uncertainty, vulnerability, emotion and action with teacher learning. This thesis contends that a risk perception lens enables a redefinition of resistance. What might look like resistance may be due to teacher’s perceptions of risk regarding their engagement in professional learning. Understanding this can enable leaders and facilitators to reduce perceptions of risk and increase teacher engagement in change.
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As I reflect on my thesis and the previous four years, many thoughts and memories flood my mind. Most of all, I am reminded of the people who have given their unwavering support, encouragement and belief that completing this doctorate was possible. It is rather ironic that my thesis is about perceptions of risk and feelings of vulnerability. On many occasions the parallels between my journey and the research were obvious as I faced my perceptions of risk and vulnerability, especially when I was challenged to expose my tentative ideas into print for others to read. What makes us challenge ourselves to enter into the unknown? There is no doubt that the support and knowledge of others make it possible.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

When those who have the power to manipulate changes act as if they have only to explain, and, when their explanations are not at once accepted, shrug off opposition as ignorance or prejudice, they express a profound contempt for the meaning of lives other than their own. (Marris, 1986, p. 155)

Resistance to change is a concept commonly employed by educators to explain why “most change initiatives fail” (Senge et al., 1999, p. 5). But is this an accurate explanation of what happens, especially from teachers’ perspectives?

Change in education is reliant on teachers engaging in and sustaining changes to their everyday practice. Teachers are expected to replace their existing familiar practices with uncertain new ones (Helsing, 2007; Ponticell, 2003). On the surface it may appear an issue of willingness, yet this framing of non-engagement in change as resistance overlooks the uncertainty or risk involved as the teachers’ future becomes “suddenly much less secure” (Marris, 1986, p. 148).

It makes good sense to consider other possible reasons why teachers appear not to engage in change rather than simplifying the explanation to one of either willingness or resistance. Traditionally, teacher resistance has been assumed to relate to individual disposition and motivation. More recently, teacher resistance has been seen as a result of competing theories or disagreement with the change often from some moral or political perspective (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006; Gitlin & Margonis, 1995; Pajares, 1992; Timperley & Robinson, 2001). Although these factors explain some teacher resistance to change, are they sufficient? Despite an abundance of research and scholarly literature on teacher resistance to change from a leadership perspective, the findings do not adequately explain:

- the dynamic nature of teacher engagement in change;
- nuances or variable levels of teacher engagement;
- why teachers agree with the need for change but do not engage;
- how teachers participate in professional learning but avoid changing; and
- why teachers are labelled resistant as a result of responding emotionally.

An alternative explanation to resistance to change is that teachers have formed perceptions of risk connected to the change, and that these perceptions of risk influence teachers’ decisions.
and engagement in change. This research brings a risk lens underpinned by uncertainty to understanding whether teachers form perceptions of risk connected to their professional learning for change, and how these perceptions may influence their decisions and actions and therefore their learning. This research will contribute to theorising about teachers’ responses in change situations and inform leadership practices centered on this long-standing problem of practice of teacher non-engagement in change. This research will also contribute to the small knowledge base that currently exists from the handful of studies that have deliberately explored teachers’ perceptions of risk and change.

Background to the Research

I began this journey interested in teacher resistance. I had planned to explore the processes and influences on teachers’ decisions not to change their practice and how these decisions were perceived and acted on by leaders. This journey led me to perceptions of risk, a concept more commonly connected with physical harm and hazards than educational change.

Risk is an everyday concept frequently discussed on our airwaves and in our conversations with each other. We connect terrorism, hazards, global warming and gambling with risk. We take risks, we create them, and we debate the extent to which we should control them for others and ourselves. We know what risk is – it is usually about danger.

The concept of risk is not new. Early references to risk are reported to date back to the farmers of Mesopotamia in 3200BC who, in predicting risks, were reported to “identify important dimensions of the problem, design alternative actions, and collect data on likely outcomes” (Trimpop, 1994, p. 1).

Despite this being a seemingly common everyday term, we know surprisingly little about the concept of risk. The study of risk is plagued with issues: the use of multiple definitions dependent on the researchers’ discipline (Aven & Renn, 2009; Carson & Bain, 2008); different conceptualisations of risk, whether real or mentally constructed by those involved (Taylor-Gooby & Zinn, 2006; Zinn, 2008); restricted foci of research to either individual differences or cultural similarities (Jackson, Allum, & Gaskell, 2006); and the interchange of the terms risk and risk perception (Aven & Renn, 2009; Howard, 2011). These issues are explored in the literature review in Chapter 2.

Risk is inherent in change (Marris, 1986) and “difficult, because the outcome is always uncertain” (Hultman, 1998, p. 63). Educational change is unquestionably a context in which
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risk may influence the processes and outcomes of the proposed changes. Even though there is a growing body of work in the field of educational change there is surprisingly little research that focuses on concepts of risk in this context. The handful of reported studies demonstrate that teachers do perceive risks, especially when they are expected to change their practice (Howard, 2009, 2011; Le Fevre, 2014; Ponticell, 2003; Reio & Lasky, 2007).

Furthermore, leaders' actions matter in this process. After reflecting on my role as a leader, I have come to realise that despite the clarity and excitement I felt, the new and changed ways to improve student outcomes were not well understood by my colleagues. My role in creating unnecessary uncertainty for teachers and the rise in emotion that inevitably occurred cannot be ignored.

Teacher emotion, especially negative emotion, is well documented in educational change literature (Antonacopoulou & Gabriel, 2001; Hargreaves, 2004, 2005; Schmidt & Datnow, 2005). Teachers have been labelled recalcitrant for responding emotionally to educational change (Richardson, 1990) and it has been noted that, “unhappy groups of teachers, however small, can derail reform efforts” (Datnow & Castellano, 2000, p. 794). For the most part, visible emotion is framed as irrational (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003) and therefore troublesome, possibly preventing leaders and colleagues from inquiring into its cause.

Additionally, the concept of risk poses issues for leaders and teachers alike. On the one hand, risk taking is necessary for change, but on the other hand, as perceptions of risk increase our willingness to participate or take risks diminishes. At other times, there are more risks in not changing than in changing. For leaders there exists a tension over the amount of change to expect. Either accepting not enough or insisting on too much change can hinder the change process (Hargreaves, 1998a). Understanding how perceptions of risk are formed and inform teachers’ decision-making can grow our knowledge of effective professional learning practices and increase the likelihood of teachers changing their practices, thereby improving outcomes for their students.

**Problem Statement**

Change in education remains elusive. Some teachers for whatever reason do not engage in changing their practice – why is this? A resistance lens is commonly used to explain this problem of practice. Yet, despite a wealth of leadership texts aimed at managing resistance to change, the problem of teacher non-engagement in change remains. A resistance to
change lens may obscure or be unable to uncover other possible explanations for lack of teacher engagement in change.

Another possible explanation of teacher non-engagement in change may originate from teachers’ perceiving risk in making the expected changes. Perceptions of risk may contribute to teachers’ decisions and actions in change causing some teachers to appear reluctant to engage with change. Teacher non-engagement in change has rarely been considered through a risk lens. This research challenges the concept of teacher resistance and instead considers the role of teacher perceptions of risk in understanding the problem of teacher non-engagement in change.

**Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of teachers’ perceptions of risk and how these perceptions influenced teachers’ sensemaking and actions in professional learning for educational change. I am interested in understanding how perceptions of risk formed, what influenced their formation, the sense teachers made of them, along with teachers’ responses and actions, and possible impact on their learning.

This research aims to extend risk perception research into the educational change context by exploring teachers’ perceptions of risk and the associated leadership and facilitation practices that either increase or reduce risk. I am also interested in how others (principals, school leaders and professional learning facilitators) made sense of teachers’ responses and actions in the professional learning context.

The following research questions were formulated to understand teachers’ perceptions of risk in the professional learning for change context:

- **RQ1**: What is the influence of perceptions of risk on teachers’ sensemaking of professional learning and their subsequent actions?
- **RQ2**: How do the actions of others mediate teachers’ perceptions of risk and sensemaking of professional learning?
- **RQ 3**: How do leaders and facilitators make sense of teachers’ emotional responses and actions in professional learning?
Research Approach

This research is embedded within the professional learning contexts of three New Zealand schools. Teachers in these schools were expected to engage in the professional learning opportunities provided to assist and support them to change their practice in order to improve student outcomes. A qualitative three-school case study approach was employed to capture the complex connections between teachers’ perceptions of risk in professional learning (the phenomenon) and their school contexts (Yin, 2009).

Semi-structured interviews of 21 teachers, 14 leaders and 4 facilitators were used to capture the experiences of teachers as they participated in professional learning. The analysis focused on psychological, social and contextual factors to capture the complex phenomenon of perceptions of risk and risk-related actions.

Assumptions

There is limited theorising about perceptions of risk in education. Therefore this research draws from risk concepts outside of education. There are a number of key assumptions taken from the reviewed literature that inform this research. The assumptions include:

- Change involves risk, albeit perceived differently by all involved.
- Perceptions of risk are predominantly about uncertainty.
- Risks and perceptions of risk are mental constructions not real entities. They are individually, socially and contextually influenced, and include rational and subjective knowledge.
- Emotion and cognition are inextricably linked with perceptions of risk.

Researcher perspective

I have been involved in education for most of my life - as a student, teacher and school leader, returning to tertiary education on a number of occasions. I have returned to the role of student once more, enjoying the challenges and rewards that engaging in a PhD bring.

Thinking back on my experiences as a teacher, on a personal level I have willingly engaged in changing my practice. This has at times been an emotional journey that questioned my knowledge, my professional identity as a teacher, and my resolve to continue. I was not resistant to what I was required to do or to the rationale behind what we were trying to do. However, despite this I experienced strong emotions including episodes of feeling
despondent, being discouraged and feeling my professional credibility was questioned. Now, I would frame this as feeling vulnerable and emotionally exposed, especially during the times my practice was under the close scrutiny of others.

Later, as a school leader, I observed teachers struggling with changing their practice. They were varyingly labelled incompetent or resistant to change by colleagues. As I worked with these teachers, it was clear they were regularly misunderstood and were not necessarily resistant to the mandated changes. Instead they were often uncertain of what was required, felt they did not have the knowledge or skills required, or needed greater clarity and different scaffolding for their new learning than the majority of other teachers. At times the relationships between the teacher and those who had the support role was complicated by mistrust and negative prior experiences. At these times emotion was high for all.

When learning and change go well there is a positive and satisfying flow to one’s work. However, at times of negative emotion, confusion and seemingly little or no change, there are no winners, least of all the children we are there for. We all need to do better at these times.

Rationale and significance of research

There is no doubt that students miss out when change initiatives are not successful. Currently, there is very little understanding of or deliberate research into teachers’ perceptions of risk in educational change, yet the potential cost of teachers experiencing high perceptions of risk may be lack of change for students because teachers avoid taking the necessary risks to learn and change. Understanding the source of the perceptions of risk that inform teachers' decision-making may lead to a greater likelihood of teachers changing their practices.

Research to date in risk in education blurs the concepts of risk perception and risk-taking actions focusing on more general outcomes (Le Fevre, 2014; Ponticell, 2003; Reio & Lasky, 2007), with less about the conditions that contribute to the formation of perceptions of risk and the associated emotional responses. Uncertainty is a necessary prerequisite in learning, yet there is also unnecessary uncertainty in the context that, if recognised could be reduced to make risk taking more tolerable or even acceptable.

It is important, therefore, that we identify the factors that influence teachers’ perceptions of risks in changing their practices, and explore sustainable ways to encourage teachers to take the necessary risks involved in trying new practices. Potentially, we can improve the success
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of professional learning and reduce unwillingness to change by increasing everyone’s awareness and understanding of the concept of risk in professional learning for change.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This research into teachers’ perceptions of risk in professional learning (PL) is based on the broad premise that change involves risk. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect notions of risk to arise for teachers who are required to change their familiar classroom practices to uncertain new ones. The use of a risk lens, focusing on uncertainty, is a relatively new approach to understanding why teachers appear reluctant to engage in changing their practices. Currently, there are only a small number of studies that deliberately explore teachers’ perceived risk in change, however the notion of risk is increasingly alluded to in studies and writing on educational change. Moreover, the concept of risk in change is gaining importance and has recently been framed as “a significant roadblock to engaging in educational change” (Le Fevre, 2014, p. 64). Although the knowledge base around risk in PL is expanding, it lacks a clear conceptualisation of what risk is. Therefore, in the absence of a clear knowledge base to refer to, I have explored the literatures on teacher change for notions of risk along with risk theories and risk-related research for concepts that may be relevant to understand teachers’ perceived risk. These diverse bodies of literature, connected by themes of emotion and uncertainty, are then used to develop the conceptual framework of perceived risk in PL that guides this research.

This review is structured into three distinct sections, with the intention of guiding the reader through these diverse bodies of literature towards the development of a conceptual framework of perceptions of risk in PL. The first section relates to the educational change context. I begin with an overview of the literature on teachers’ resistance to change, and then focus on the role of emotion and socio-cultural contextual factors that are thought to influence engagement in PL.

In the second section, I introduce risk theories and risk-related research, mostly from beyond education, to provide background information and highlight some of the issues in studying risk. Then I review the small collection of studies that explore risk in PL, highlighting gaps and identifying key ideas to incorporate in my research.

In the third section, I present sensemaking and frame theories as a way to conceptualise how people make meaning from their experiences, which for this research relates to how teachers
make sense of their PL experiences. This chapter concludes by outlining the conceptual framework that brings these theories, sensemaking, framing and risk, together.

For the purposes of this review emotion is treated in the broader sense (Cahour, 2013) referring to emotion as “a wide range of affective processes, including feelings, moods, affects and well-being” (Boekaerts, 2010, p. 94). Emotion is the preferred term, however at times these terms are used interchangeably. Key terms and their meanings are included in Appendix A.

**Educational Change Context**

In this section, I review the relevant literature within educational research to provide a wider context of research into teachers’ responses to educational change, focusing on engagement in change, emotion, uncertainty and risk. After defining the professional learning context, I provide an overview of the literature on teacher resistance to change to present the commonly held theories for teachers’ non-engagement in educational change, followed by a brief account of managing resistance. I then explore the literature on teacher emotion in education and the role of emotion in learning and change. Next, the literature on trust, psychological safety and vulnerability are presented, acknowledging their impact on teachers’ learning.

In order to understand risk for teachers during educational change, it is necessary to consider how the teacher as learner interacts with their context. This *professional learning* context, as it is referred to throughout this thesis, contains attributes, content and activities that differ from teachers’ prior contexts and experiences creating spaces for uncertainty and the processes of change to occur.

This research is embedded within the professional learning contexts of three New Zealand schools. Throughout this thesis, I use the term professional learning in preference to professional development, which in the New Zealand context connotes attendance at one off workshops and conferences, typically with little impact in the classroom (Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2007). In their 2007 review of research on professional learning and development contexts that impacted on teacher practice in the classroom, Timperley et al. reported seven elements that were important for professional learning to promote positive and sustained students outcomes. These included the provision of time, external expertise, focus on engaging teachers, challenging problematic discourses, opportunities to interact with others, content consistent with research and policy, and leaders actively involved in the professional learning as learners and leaders. This list underscores the complexity of
successful professional learning and reminds us why “substantive change is difficult” (Timperley et al., 2007, p. xi).

Successful professional learning requires more than exposure to new knowledge. Timperley et al. highlight three cognitive processes involved in changing teacher practice: “cueing and retrieving prior knowledge; becoming aware of new information and skills; and creating dissonance with a teacher’s current position” (2007, p. 7). Teachers may feel uncomfortable, uncertain and emotional as they engage with these cognitive processes as part of new learning aimed at supporting them to replace their existing practices with uncertain and unfamiliar ones. Their professional learning context is inevitably in the process of changing, and non-engagement with the changes is just one of the possible responses by teachers.

**Teacher resistance to change: Common perspectives**

Our understanding of teacher resistance to change has emerged as a by-product of being motivated to answer, “why innovations are not implemented as their developers anticipated” (Richardson, 1990, p. 11). Although we readily apply the label of resistance to such behaviours as refusal, rejection or avoidance, there appears to be little agreement on either the cause or nature of teacher resistance, let alone how to deal with it successfully.

Teacher resistance or non-engagement in change creates a conundrum for change agents - individual teacher change is necessary for systemic change, yet “teachers exercise considerable control over the decision of whether and how to implement a change” (Richardson, 1990, p. 13). Additionally, there is an expectation that all teachers will engage in educational change in their schools, ensuring some level of non-engagement is inevitable. Leaders are expected to deal with this resistance to change, as to ignore resistance increases the likelihood of the status quo enduring (Bishop, O'Sullivan, & Berryman, 2010).

Teachers are commonly expected to be “doing something that others are suggesting they do” (Richardson, 1990, p. 11). Although many teachers willingly adopt these suggestions for change, others adapt them, with the remainder ignoring or displaying resistance to change by showing a “desire and intention to maintain existing practices in the face of changes that they perceive as unwanted or threatening” (Giles, 2006, p. 160). Early studies into teacher resistance focused on either personal factors in the teacher and or their organisation (Richardson, 1990). This work viewed teachers as unwilling to change and “simply recalcitrant because of the nonscientific, nonrational norms of the teaching occupation” (Richardson, 1990, p. 11). Teacher resistance was seen as an emotional response such as
being fearful of change and desiring to keep things the same (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006; Giles, 2006; Zimmerman, 2006); feeling threatened or personally criticised as a change in practice assumes that current practices are no longer acceptable (Giles, 2006; Knight, 2009; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2008; Zimmerman, 2006); blaming factors outside the classroom (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2008); fear of being judged or held accountable (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2008); and concern and insecurity at not feeling able to make the changes (Fullan, 2008; Williamson & Blackburn, 2010).

Recognition of organisational factors impacting on “teachers’ engagement, commitment and willingness to change or learn, or lack thereof” (Richardson, 1990, p. 11) led to viewing resistance through a management or leadership lens. Reasons frequently cited in this literature for teacher resistance include the lack of a collaborative culture for teachers (Fullan, 2001); teachers not valuing the required changes (Williamson & Blackburn, 2010; Zimmerman, 2006); lack of belief the changes will make a difference or are worthwhile (Fullan, 2008; O’Sullivan, Carroll, & Cavanagh, 2008); the ease or difficulty of implementation and whether it is viewed as working (Knight, 2009; O’Sullivan et al., 2008); the cumulative negative effect from prior experience in unsuccessful change (Fullan, 2008; Knight, 2009; Zimmerman, 2006); and lack of capacity to implement the change (Fullan, 2008).

A further approach to understanding teacher resistance to change uses a cognitive lens in an attempt to make sense of what happens inside the head of teachers during change. It is now widely accepted that understanding teachers’ belief systems is necessary for understanding change (Timperley & Robinson, 2001; Timperley et al., 2007), as teachers’ beliefs influence their perceptions and judgments, which in turn, affect their behaviour in the classroom (Pajares, 1992). Therefore, as meanings are mediated via existing theories, teacher beliefs can exert a powerful effect on what teachers learn from professional learning efforts, with resistance a possible response when existing beliefs conflict with the new beliefs (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006; Keys, 2007; Pajares, 1992; Timperley & Robinson, 2001).

Most of the literature on change assumes that the desired changes are worthwhile, and that resistance must therefore be a negative response. Rarely is resistance conceived as a positive response to an expected change, however some researchers suggest that there may be good sense in why some teachers resist change (Giles, 2006; Gitlin & Margonis, 1995). Gitlin and Margonis reported that some teachers had real concerns over their ability to implement a change because of inadequate time allocation and workload issues, something that resonates
with many teachers confronted with expectations to change their practice. Similarly, Achinstein and Ogawa raise the notion of “principled resistance” to reform (2006, p. 32). They documented the personal cost of two teachers who questioned the implementation of a scripted literacy programme that removed teachers’ autonomy to make curriculum decisions for their students. These politically framed reasons for non-engagement are not necessarily driven by uncertainty and may occur alongside risk-related non-engagement.

Leaders are faced with addressing teacher resistance to change in their schools. Common approaches advocated in the literature to support leaders to manage resistance include “to do” lists and strategies for school leaders to “manage resistance” such as sharing decision making with staff and supporting and providing time for professional development. These strategies however, do not explicitly address or engage teachers’ beliefs.

In contrast, Timperley (2011b) provides a continuum of descriptors for “coping with resistance” where, at the basic level, teachers themselves are initially treated as the problem, through to an integrated level where “disagreements are treated as competing theories in need of resolution” (p. 161). The continuum, however, belies the skill and practice needed by a leader to be able to change teacher practice by challenging beliefs using an inquiry habit of mind and theory competition.

Other researchers have advocated for talking about change, thereby raising awareness of the expected processes that occur as part of change. Le Fevre contends that talking about change “has the potential to empower people to work with the challenges inherent in change and help them gain a stronger meta-cognitive awareness of these processes” (2010, p. 71).

Teacher resistance to changing their practice is “one of the greatest challenges leaders face” (Timperley, 2011a, p. 128). Research into teacher resistance has not purposefully explored perceptions of risk as a possible explanation for teachers’ non-engagement in change, nor has the research into teacher emotions considered the role that perceptions of risk might play in teachers’ emotional responses to educational change. The role of emotion in education is discussed next.

**Emotion in education**

Educational researchers have traditionally shown a wariness towards studying emotion, with studies focused on emotion in education the least investigated aspect of teaching (Hargreaves, 1998a; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003; Zembylas, 2005a). This is despite teaching and learning
being described as emotional practices (Hargreaves, 1998a, 1998b, 2001; Zembylas, 2005a) and an increasing awareness of the importance of emotion in learning environments (Istance & Dumont, 2010; Pekrun, 2011; Pekrun & Perry, 2014).

Educational research into emotion has been attributed to gaining importance as a result of the 1996 special edition of the *Cambridge Journal of Education* (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003). Two years later in 1998, Hargreaves’ well-known paper “The Emotional Practice of Teaching” was published, yet researchers continued to research cognition, with relatively little known or recognition of teachers’ emotions (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003). Sutton and Wheatley hypothesised two reasons for this apparent reluctance to engage in research on emotion. Firstly, they suggested it reflected the time lag between interest shown by psychological researchers in emotion in the 1980s and the concept of emotion being taken up by educational researchers. However, and perhaps more significantly, is that emotion and emotional responses have historically been perceived negatively as irrational in wider Western society (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003). More recently, Zembylas (2005b) echoed the continuing presence of this negative view of teacher emotion when he highlighted the emotional rules that pressured his case-study teacher to control her emotion to remain professional. Writing about school leaders, Beatty (2000; 2011) also connected emotional control and the desire to appear rational with the concept of professionalism. Emotional responses, especially negative emotional responses, remain tarred by this historical and political view of emotion as irrational and therefore troublesome.

Emotion is inevitable during educational change (Antonacopoulou & Gabriel, 2001; Hargreaves, 1998a, 2004, 2005), particularly when change is required at the classroom level (J. A. Schmidt & Datnow, 2005). A significant piece on emotion in educational change appeared in 2005 when *Teaching and Teacher Education* dedicated Issue 21 to papers on emotion in educational change and personal identity. In this issue, Reio (2005) foreshadowed the presence of risk in educational change. In his introduction to the issue, he highlighted the influence of teachers’ emotional responses on their risk-taking actions and identity formation during educational change. Reio warned, “change evokes negative emotions due to insufficient information and vague perceptions of unnecessary loss” (2005, p. 992). This journal included papers on agency and vulnerability (Lasky, 2005); personal identity (Reio, 2005; van Veen, Sleegers, & van de Ven, 2005); self-understanding (Kelchtermans, 2005); emotions in school reform (J. A. Schmidt & Datnow, 2005); and age and career stage effects on emotions during change (Hargreaves, 2005).
Since then, there has been a growing number of edited works on emotion in education including Schutz and Pekrun’s (2007) *Emotion in Education*; Schutz and Zembylas’ (2009) *Advances in Teacher Emotion Research: The impact on teachers’ lives*; Day and Lee’s (2011) *Emotions and Educational Change*; and most recently Pekrun & Linnenbrink-Garcia’s (2014) *International Handbook of Emotion in Education*. These works stress the ever-present influence of emotion in education. Although there is a growing knowledge base on emotions in education, there remains a limited research base on teacher emotion in change beyond descriptions of its presence, the impact of emotion and change on identity, and a small number of studies on teachers’ achievement emotions (Frenzel, Goetz, Stephens, & Jacob, 2009; Frenzel, 2014). Next I summarise aspects of teacher emotion in learning and change that connect with uncertainty and risk.

**Teacher emotion in learning and change**

The presence of emotion in teaching, learning, and change (Hargreaves, 1998a, 1998b, 2001; Kelchtermans, 1996, 2011) is not disputed with educational change considered “emotionally laborious and challenging” (Cross & Hong, 2009, p. 273). There is no doubt that change involves extra work and stress, and that an organisation undergoing change is different to one maintaining the status quo. Change in the workplace is likely to include “increased fear, stress, uncertainty and complexity” (Clark, 2008, p. 67). This connection of change to uncertainty links change contexts directly to contexts for risk taking and emotion.

Although emotion in educational change is acknowledged as an expected response or product of educational reform (Hargreaves, 1998a; Reio, 2011; Saunders, 2012; J. A. Schmidt & Datnow, 2005; Zembylas & Barker, 2007; Zembylas & Schutz, 2009), especially at the start (Cross & Hong, 2009), less is known about how emotion occurs in change contexts. In addition, little is known about the antecedent conditions and triggers of emotional responses or the effect of emotional responses on teachers’ actions.

Emotions are described as complex (Cahour, 2013; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003) “multifaceted phenomena involving sets of coordinated psychological processes, including affective, cognitive, physiological, motivational, and expressive components” (Scherer, as cited in Pekrun, 2011, p. 24). Emotions are broadly considered to occur in response to an individual’s interaction with their environment. As such, factors within the individual, the situation and their interaction contribute to an individual’s emotional response. This means that individuals bring their own emotional histories and ways of responding to each situation.
Additionally, emotions are posited as social constructions that form during interactions with others and made sense of through our cultural understandings (Hargreaves, 1998a; Schutz, Aultman, & Williams-Johnson, 2009). Each situation has its own particular social, cultural (Antonacopoulou & Gabriel, 2001) and power relations embedded in the context (Zembylas & Schutz, 2009). These also influence the outcome. This complex interaction of factors creates a wide range of possible emotional responses.

Thus, it is not surprising that teachers respond in diverse ways to the same change initiative, or that individual teachers may respond differently to different requests for change (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2008; Hargreaves, 2005; Kelchtermans, Ballet, & Piot, 2009). It is also possible for teachers to respond positively and negatively to the same expected change (Darby, 2008; Saunders, 2012). This has been explained in relation to teachers’ goal-related processes (Cross & Hong, 2009; Frenzel et al., 2009; Frenzel, 2014; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003), or teachers viewing change as either a threat or an opportunity (Antonacopoulou & Gabriel, 2001). Emotional responses are thought to connect to evolutionary purposes such as fight and flight action tendencies (Frenzel et al., 2009). They are not irrational processes (Antonacopoulou & Gabriel, 2001) as they have traditionally been framed.

Much of the research on emotion in education focuses on the socio-cultural contexts or the individual and their emotions, rather than the complex interaction of the context and the individual per se. On the one hand, researchers using sociological approaches have related emotion as a response to social and contextual factors (van Veen et al., 2005), especially in response to political or power relations in the context (Hargreaves, 1998a; Zembylas, 2005b). On the other hand, researchers using psychological approaches have studied the connection between emotion, motivation and goal-related factors (Cross & Hong, 2009; Frenzel et al., 2009; Frenzel, 2014; Schutz et al., 2009) or alternatively between decision-making, cognition and learning (Cahour, 2013).

Further complexity to studying emotion in education arises from how the relationship between cognition and emotion is conceptualised. Our understanding of the role of emotion and cognition in human behaviour has changed over time. Historically, dating back to Plato, emotion, cognition and motivation were viewed as separate oppositional processes (Scherer, 2000), whereas they are currently viewed as inseparable processes that work together (Boekaerts, 2010; Cahour, 2013; Hargreaves, 1998a; Hinton & Fischer, 2010; Nias, 1996; J. A. Schmidt & Datnow, 2005; van Veen & Sleeegers, 2009). The challenge for researchers is to understand the nature of their inseparable, interactive and reciprocal influence in people’s
decision-making (Antonacopoulou & Gabriel, 2001; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003). Not only is their relationship interdependent, it is hypothesised to be dynamic and fluctuating as in a “dance of affect and reason” (Finucane, Peters, & Slovic, 2003, p. 327).

In addition to being a response to a situation, emotion impacts on future actions by changing the level of arousal (Boekaerts, 2010) and providing information, consciously or unconsciously, for the individual’s decision making and action processes (Cahour, 2013; Frenzel et al., 2009; Slovic, 2010). Emotion has been linked to impact on the selection of teaching practices (Frenzel et al., 2009; Saunders, 2012), with positive and negative emotion posited to impact in different ways. Positive emotion is posited to motivate further learning (Boekaerts, 2010; Pekrun, 2011); broaden attention, cognition and action (Fredrickson, 2001; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005); and is associated with the use of creative and flexible teaching strategies (Frenzel et al., 2009; Frenzel, 2014). In contrast, negative emotion is linked to inhibiting learning (Antonacopoulou & Gabriel, 2001) and reducing teacher effectiveness (James, 2011). This is posited to occur by narrowing or distracting the individual’s attention (Boekaerts, 2010; Fiedler & Beier, 2014; Pekrun & Perry, 2014), thoughts and actions (Fredrickson, 2001; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005); restricting flexibility through adherence to pre-determined plans (Frenzel et al., 2009); and promoting “convergent, analytical, detail-oriented thinking” (Frenzel, 2014, p. 509).

Emotion has also been closely linked to impacting on teacher identity and well-being (Cross & Hong, 2009; Darby, 2008; Hargreaves, 1998a, 1998b; Lasky, 2005; Nias, 1996; Saunders, 2012; J. A. Schmidt & Datnow, 2005; M. Schmidt, 2000; Schutz & Zembylas, 2009a; van Veen et al., 2005; van Veen & Sleegers, 2006, 2009; Zembylas, 2005b) and self-understanding (Kelchtermans, 2005). Identity formation is the subject of much research. Relevant to this research is the dynamic nature of identity construction whereby existing identity is open to threat or strengthening through an individual’s interaction with the processes of change in educational change contexts. These contexts can threaten existing identities as expectations to implement new practices either infer that existing ones are ineffective or challenge teachers’ feelings of competency when learning new tasks (Darby, 2008), leading to negative emotional responses and interfering with teachers’ social relationships.
Social factors: Trust, psychological safety and vulnerability

Social factors in the PL context such as trust, safety and vulnerability, influence the processes of change. Professional learning activities, as part of educational change, create the possibility for relationship-based uncertainty to surface (Nelson, Slavit, Perkins, & Hathorn, 2008). This uncertainty occurs when teachers are required to work collaboratively with others or expose their practice to leaders and external providers. The presence of trust is posited to reduce this uncertainty (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000).

The presence of trust has been identified as pivotal for successful educational change (Bryk & Schneider, 2002, 2003; Forsyth, Adams, & Hoy, 2011; Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Trust is closely tied to risk and uncertainty. Risk occurs through perceived uncertainty connected to “whether the other intends to and will act appropriately” (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998, p. 395). Bryk and Schneider (2003) promote this relational trust as “the connective tissue that binds individuals together to advance education and welfare of students” (p. 45). Implicit in this binding is a mutual dependency or “interdependence, where the interests of one party cannot be achieved without reliance upon another” (Rousseau et al., 1998, p. 395). In educational change this requires trust across multiple layers in a school, and Tschannen-Moran & Hoy (1998) indicate that ideally leaders should demonstrate trustworthy actions first.

Trust is considered an “elusive concept” with many definitions (Cerna, 2014). Forsyth et al. describe trust as “a state in which individuals and groups are willing to make themselves vulnerable to others and take risks with confidence that others will respond to their actions in positive ways, that is benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty and openness” (2011, pp. 18-19). It is implicit in this description that an individual makes a decision on how to act based on his or her sensemaking of ongoing observations of others’ actions and responses. In this way, perceptions of trust or trustworthiness depend on day-to-day actions and interactions within the context (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Kaser & Halbert, 2009; Resnick, Spillane, Goldman, & Rangel, 2010).

When trust is present, members experience a sense of “collective trust” (Forsyth et al., 2011) or team psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999). Edmondson describes psychological safety as members holding “a sense of confidence that the team will not embarrass, reject or punish someone for speaking up” (1999, p. 354). Both collective trust and psychological safety are linked directly to concepts of risk by highlighting that the presence of trust creates
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a context “safe for interpersonal risk taking” (Edmondson, 1999, p. 354) such as asking for help and making mistakes (Bryk & Schneider, 2002, 2003; Edmondson, 2008; Hargreaves, 1998a; Higgins, Ishimaru, Holcombe, & Fowler, 2012). Similarly, Hargreaves proposed the concept of psychological security, where teachers need to be “given the basic security of being trusted and valued” (1998a, p. 326) for them to experiment and take risks with new approaches. For Hargreaves, risk has to be “harmonized with security” (1998a, p. 325).

The presence of trust is posited to moderate uncertainty and vulnerability (Bryk & Schneider, 2002); increase safety and belonging for learning (Kaser & Halbert, 2009); lessen perceptions of risk (Kasperson et al., as cited in Slovic, 2010); enable risk taking (Schein, 2010; Senge et al., 1999); and increase rates of change (Forsyth et al., 2011). Trust is dynamic; therefore it cannot be guaranteed that levels of trust will remain between members of a group or across different contexts. Additionally, trust requires time to develop (Brown, 2013; Rousseau et al., 1998; Walaski, 2011), yet it is quickly lost and difficult to repair such as after someone behaves dishonestly (Hallam, Dulaney, Hite, & Smith, 2014; Kaser & Halbert, 2009; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998).

Vulnerability has been described as the core of trust and interdependence (Forsyth et al., 2011; Rousseau et al., 1998; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998; Van Maele, Forsyth, & Van Houtte, 2014). When we trust we are willingly vulnerable to others. In professional learning, especially when our practice is exposed, we place our “confidence and perceived competence on the line” (Hargreaves, 1998a, p. 324), as the presence of trust cannot be assumed between the teacher and the observer. This creates space for perceptions of risks, uncertainty and vulnerability. In these situations, teachers may choose to limit the level of risk they are comfortable to take, despite expectations from others to the contrary.

Risk and uncertainty create feelings of vulnerability and a need to trust in others’ actions (Forsyth et al., 2011; Hoy & Tarter, 2004; Rousseau et al., 1998; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Trust is also a product of successful, shared vulnerability “that grows over time and requires work, attention and full engagement” (Brown, 2013, p. 41). Consequently, trust is posited to foster vulnerability and is also an outcome of experiences where sharing one’s vulnerability has been respected (Bryk & Schneider, 2003).

Researchers in and beyond education conceptualise vulnerability in different ways depending on whether it is considered an emotional experience, a contextual condition or both (Bullough, 2005; Gilson, 2014; Lasky, 2005; Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009; Kelchtermans et al., 2009).
For example, Kelchtermans (2009) distinguishes between structural vulnerability related to the conditions of teaching and that of the emotions that occur in response to experiencing this vulnerability. He refers to teachers’ working conditions as reflecting lack of control, difficulty in proving teacher effectiveness and the contestable nature of professional decisions. As a result of these conditions and power relations, Kelchtermans hypothesises that teachers experience vulnerability as “feeling that one’s professional identity and moral integrity, as part of being ‘a proper teacher’, are questioned and that valued workplace conditions are thereby threatened or lost” (2009, p. 78). Structural vulnerability is similar to Helsing’s notion of uncertainty inherent in teaching “due to its lack of knowledge base or technical culture” (2007, p. 1317) and to Gilson’s (2014) situational vulnerability.

Bullough (2005) also acknowledges the link between vulnerability, uncertainty and teachers’ working conditions. He differentiates vulnerability in terms of where the source of vulnerability is located with different sources having variable influence. On the one hand, vulnerability can occur from internal sources such as relationships with students, feelings around competence and failure-related factors. On the other hand, vulnerability can occur from external sources such as resources and policy matters. Bullough posits that teachers might choose certainty and security over growth, inferring that uncertainty and the notion of risk are reasons not to act. He introduces the notion of invulnerability to explain the actions taken by someone to avoid failure, discomfort and self-doubt.

There is no doubt that teachers’ working contexts contain or create structural uncertainty for teachers. Educational change intensifies existing structural uncertainty as teachers grapple with the new learning and the related upheaval such as possible conflict between one’s own beliefs and those of the policy message (Lasky, 2005). Change in a school contains greater uncertainty for teachers than their everyday pre-change teaching contexts.

As an emotional state or feeling, vulnerability is commonly considered negatively, synonymous with weakness (Brown, 2010, 2013; Gilson, 2014). The 5th Edition Collins Concise Dictionary (2001) defines vulnerability as the possibility of being “physically or emotionally wounded or hurt” (p. 1693). Brown, a researcher who studies shame, introduced vulnerability into the public domain via her 2010 TED talk titled, The Power of Vulnerability. For her, vulnerability is about “uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure” (Brown, 2013, p. 34). Brown highlights the social nature of vulnerability and its close connection to risk.
Despite this predominantly negative connotation, some researchers consider vulnerability to also have a positive side (Bullough, 2005; Brown, 2013; Gilson, 2014; Lasky, 2005; Kelchtermans, 2011). Positive vulnerability relates to being open and willing to engage in risk taking in contrast to negative or “inefficacious vulnerability” (Lasky, 2005, p. 904), characterised by insecurity, protecting self and uncertainty.

Vulnerability, like trust, is an elusive concept with fluctuating intensity and valence (Lasky, 2005). It is highly dependent and responsive to the context (Ecclestone & Lewis, 2013), where critical moments can trigger or intensify a person’s feelings of vulnerability (Kelchtermans, 1996; Lasky, 2005). Vulnerability is described as “a multidimensional multifaceted emotional experience” (Lasky, 2005, p. 901). As such, vulnerability is connected to the context and being exposed to others (Brown, 2013; Kelchtermans, 2009), but does not reside within the person (Ecclestone & Lewis, 2013). In general, the work of these researchers supports the idea that levels of trust, vulnerability, emotion and identity reconstruction are an expected part of an educational change context, with individuals responding to and influencing these conditions in unique ways.

Risk Theories and Research

In this section, I review relevant literature on risk and perceptions of risk, firstly from outside of education, to provide background information and highlight some of the issues in studying risk, as well as positioning this study relative to these issues. Then I present what has been learned from the small number of studies on teacher risk taking in change. I finish by highlighting key ideas from these studies within education that are relevant to this research.

Defining risk and risk perception

Scholars have long been interested in explaining and predicting peoples’ responses to risk; however there are issues that continue to constrain our understanding. A central issue in risk research centres on conflicting definitions. There are multiple definitions of risk depending on the researcher’s discipline (Aven & Renn, 2009; Carson & Bain, 2008).

One cause of these conflicting definitions centres on how the researcher conceptualises risk. Aven and Renn (2009) highlight this diversity of thought around risk stating that “the concept of risk is used as an expected value, a probability distribution, as uncertainty and as an event” (p. 1). They argue that risk is not a state of the world such as an event or consequence, (e.g. a classroom observation for the professional learning), but that risk refers to the uncertainty
about the event or consequence in relation to its severity (a leader may or may not talk to others about observation which may or may not go well). This more recent focus on uncertainty in place of probability places a greater emphasis on the role of knowledge in risk (Aven & Renn, 2009; Aven & Krohn, 2014). Uncertainty may result from “‘known uncertainties’ – we know what we do not know, and ‘unknown uncertainties’ (ignorance or non- knowledge) – we do not know what we do not know” (Aven & Renn, 2009, p. 9). They theorise that, “risk refers to uncertainty about and severity of the events and consequences (or outcomes) of an activity with respect to something that humans value” (Aven & Renn, 2009, p. 6).

In many ways, this diversity in defining risk depends on whether risk is viewed as “real” or socially constructed. Zinn (2008) remarks that theorising about risk occurs “on a continuum between a realist perspective and radical constructivism” (p. 172), with subjective bias and socially mediated theories somewhere in between. From a realist perspective, risks are real dangers, and scientific knowledge is used to calculate the probability of it happening and its likely damage. Using this perspective, expert opinions are privileged over laypersons’ views and real risks are differentiated from imagined risks (Taylor-Gooby & Zinn, 2006). At the other extreme, social constructivist theories view risk as being solely constructed by people as a “product of social processes” (Taylor-Gooby & Zinn, p. 408). Emotion plays a central role in these social processes. From this perspective, knowledge is socially constructed; therefore risks are also socially constructed (Zinn, 2008).

Added to these differences is that the terms risk and risk perception are often used interchangeably, and given the diversity in risk definition, it is not surprising that there is some dispute over the difference between the terms (Aven & Renn, 2009; Howard, 2011). While research into risk has a long history, risk perception research in its own right is fairly recent, being traced to the nuclear debate in the 1960s (Keller et al., 2012; Sjoberg, 2000a). Aven and Renn suggest the two concepts can be separated by thinking about risk as uncertainty around an event, with perceptions of risk including an evaluative component. They posit that “risk requires a mental construction of the uncertainty (knowledge) dimension” (Aven & Renn, 2009, p. 6) whereas risk perception is the person’s judgment about the risk and how the risk affects them.

In 1994, Trimpop highlighted the evaluative component of risk perception, but he also alerted us to the complexity and multifaceted nature of perceptions of risk when he hypothesised it as a dynamic process, determined by the stimulus, environmental conditions and personality.
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factors. For Trimpop, a person’s physiological, emotional and cognitive responses are processed, evaluated and combined to inform an overall assessment of the risk, with a subsequent decision and action. Fifteen years later, Aven and Renn (2009) defined risk perception similarly as “the person’s judgement about a risk and can be influenced by the facts … scientific risk assessments, the individual’s own calculations and assessments, as well as perceptual factors such as dread or personality factors such as a personal preference for risk-averse behaviour” (p. 8).

In this research, perceptions of risk are conceptualised as mental constructions, "all about thoughts, beliefs and constructs" (Sjoberg, 1979, as cited in Sjoberg, 2000b, p. 408). They include both rational and subjective processes that are mediated by individual, social, situational and contextual factors. This positions my research towards the social constructivist end of the realist-constructivist continuum and aligns with Aven and Renn’s (2009) definitions above. Put simply, risk involves uncertainty around an event and its consequences, with perception of risk being a person’s judgment about this risk. Implicit in both risk and risk perception is that it is about something that matters to the person.

**Theoretical perspectives on risk and risk perception**

There are two main theoretical perspectives on risk explored in this literature review. Where psychologists have tried to explain individual differences in risk-taking behaviours and responses to perceived risks, sociologists have focused on the role of culture in determining meaning and the relative importance we place on risks. Both psychologically oriented and sociologically oriented theories on risk are criticised primarily because of their predominant focus on either individual or socio-cultural factors. In this research I am interested in combining psychological and sociological perspectives by exploring the individual and the social, situational and contextual influences on teachers’ perceptions of risk. Next, I review research findings from both perspectives starting with psychological theories and followed by sociological theories of risk.

**Psychological theories of risk**

Early research by mainstream psychologists focused on the more rational aspects of our responses to risk, with little consideration for the effect of feelings (Slovic, 2010; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003; Taylor-Gooby & Zinn, 2006). They viewed perceptions of risk as cognitive processes affected by biases. This approach led researchers to study ways in which people
used heuristics to shape risk judgments. An example of a risk heuristic is loss aversion where loss appears more intense than an equivalent gain (Kahneman, 2011; Taylor-Gooby & Zinn, 2006). While studying gambling behaviour, researchers found participants preferred not to lose money despite the prospect of winning more than they stood to lose. For them, “losses loom larger than gains” (Kahneman, 2011, p. 284). For teachers, loss aversion may bias a teacher to take actions that avoid risk taking and possible losses from receiving negative feedback on their practice, rather than taking actions for potential gains in receiving positive feedback.

A second psychological strand of risk research is the psychometric tradition (Taylor-Gooby and Zinn, 2006). This tradition also conceptualises perceptions of risk from a cognitive perspective. It assumes that risk perceptions can be quantified; therefore researchers use quantitative measures such as questionnaires and surveys to find out which risks concern people the most. Psychometric research has been primarily interested in identifying factors such as dread and familiarity to explain people's perceptions of risk. Dread refers to anticipating fear from the consequences of risk, and familiarity refers to “the extent to which the risk is seen to be known and controllable or, alternatively, simply uncertain” (Taylor-Gooby & Zinn, 2006, p. 400).

Early research in this paradigm viewed risk perceptions as “deliberate mechanistic strategies” (Slovic, 2010, p. xx), however this view has since been modified to include emotions. Slovic, a well-respected researcher in this tradition, wrote in the introduction to his book, *The Feeling of Risk*, that “he has come to appreciate the important role that feelings play in guiding human behaviour in general and risk perceptions and risk decisions in particular” (2010, p. xxii). This paradigm now assumes that “risk is subjectively defined by individuals who may be influenced by a wide array of psychological, social, institutional and cultural factors” (Slovic, 2010, p. xxv), blurring the psychological-sociological boundaries.

Perceptions of risk involve more than cognition (Sjoberg, 2000a). The inclusion of emotion with cognition in people’s perceptions of risk gained credibility from Damasio’s work in the 1990s with brain-injured patients (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007). Damasio demonstrated that emotion, especially negative emotion, influenced non brain-injured participant’s reasoning processes but not those patients whose brain injury affected their ability to express or experience emotions. These patients appeared unable to learn from their previous mistakes, yet their problem-solving skills were deemed unimpaired. This work challenged the existing beliefs of the time that emotion was not connected to rational
decision-making, showing instead that it was essential (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007; Slovic et al., 2004). Emotions as reviewed earlier are complex, “multicomponential processes” (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003, p. 329) that we are yet to fully understand.

Current work in psychometric research continues to build on the 1994 work of Epstein (Slovic et al., 2004). Epstein proposed two different modes of thinking when judging risks. People use a quick, *experiential* system with an affective and memory base, or a much slower rational, *analytic* system using logic and “conscious cost–benefit weighing of possible risks” (Howard, 2011, p. 263). These two approaches, also referred to as System 1 and System 2 modes of thinking (Kahneman, 2011), are thought to interact as a “dance of affect and reason” (Finucane et al., 2003). In this way, both emotion and cognition influence thoughts and actions and therefore risk judgments.

In developing this theory further, researchers proposed the affect heuristic commonly referred to as gut feelings to explain peoples’ quick judgments based on positive and negative affect (Slovic et al., 2004). Not surprisingly, emotions contribute in different ways depending on their valence, that is, whether they are viewed as positive or negative. Positive emotions are linked to perceptions of lower risk and higher benefit, whereas negative emotions such as anxiety, fear, guilt or dread are linked to higher perceived risk, lower benefit, and unpleasant or undesirable judgments (Slovic, 2010; Slovic et al., 2004). Perceptions of risk based on emotion are also thought to be more difficult to change and are “subject to inherent bias” (Slovic et al., 2004, p. 319). Panchur and colleagues summarised existing support for the affect heuristic stating that there is ‘converging evidence that emotions guide and impact risk perceptions ... and that different emotions can vary in their influence on risk judgments” (Panchur, Hertwig, & Steinmann, 2012, p. 3). These studies emphasise the inescapable influence of emotion on perceptions of risk.

Lastly, psychological theories of risk perception have been criticised because they do not typically consider a person's cultural and social factors to account for individual differences in perceived risk (Jackson et al., 2006). Sociologically oriented researchers study the influence of social and cultural factors on risk perception. This perspective is the lesser researched with an electronic search at the time of writing resulting in 3.6 times more hits for psychological theories of risk compared to sociological theories of risk.
Sociological theories of risk

Sociologists in their study of risk have emphasised the “role of shared ideas and normative frameworks, understood in terms of the contribution of cultural and social factors” (Taylor-Gooby & Zinn, 2006, p. 401). They assume that individual and group perceptions of risk are strongly affected by their group memberships and wider cultural worldviews (Jackson et al., 2006; Wildavsky & Dake, 1990). In the 1970s sociocultural theorists led by Mary Douglas, proposed a grid-group model of social organisations where bonding or cohesion of the group or organisation, along with hierarchy and authority, are claimed to account for people’s responses to risks (Renn, 1992; Wildavsky & Dake, 1990). Risk perceptions from this perspective are a cultural process based on collective worldviews. For example, individualistic cultures are more likely to perceive risk in terms of potential for gain. Although there is little doubt that culture influences a person’s conceptions of risk, empirical support for the grid group theory “is surprisingly meagre” (Olteidal, Moen, Klempe, & Rundmo, 2004, p. 1). Cultural theories of risk are usually criticised because they do not account for the psychology of individuals’ perceptions, ignoring the diversity of individual risk judgments in preference to commonalities of groups (Jackson et al., 2006).

To sum up, the formation of perceptions of risk is a complex process that is individually driven yet socially and culturally mediated. Therefore studies that focus on these factors in isolation of the others only explain some aspects of perceptions of risk. Perceptions of risk are dynamic rather than static and involve the constant interaction of emotion and cognition, in both conscious and unconscious processes, thereby creating immense complexity. This complexity and interconnectedness of psychological and socio-cultural processes makes the study of perceptions of risk both complex and challenging.

Educational research: Connecting risk and teacher change

Earlier I reviewed literature on emotion in educational change and demonstrated that emotion is an important concept in educational research (Pekrun, 2011), and that the socio-cultural context of change not only impacts on emotion, but is itself influenced by the presence of emotion. Additionally, the risk literature confirmed the role of emotion in perceptions of risk as uncontested (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007; Sjoberg, 2000a; Slovic, 2010). Yet, researchers are slow to deliberately connect uncertainty, risk and emotion in the context of educational change.
There is some agreement over the existence of risk within educational research, however there is a paucity of studies deliberately investigating concepts of risk in education (Reio, 2005). Some researchers have suggested that risk is embedded in teaching due to its inherent uncertainty (Helsing, 2007, p. 1317), whereas other researchers allude to the presence of risk and risk taking in change when discussing their research findings. However, they do not explore the concept of risk further, and for the most part focus on the closely related field of teacher emotion during educational change. Boekaerts (2010), for example, includes risk in losing face; Forsyth, et al. (2011) posit that collective trust requires risk taking; Hargreaves (1998a) warns that risk can generate negative emotions such as anxiety, and the need for leaders to manage risk with trust support and time; Hoy & Tarter (2004) link risk and trust; and Kelchtermans (2009) refers to “teaching as a risky endeavour” (p. 270).

This next sub-section explores the small number of studies that deliberately investigated teachers’ perceptions of risk or risk taking in professional learning and educational change. I have included Hall and Hord’s (2015) Stages of Concern model as their concept of concerns has similarities to perceptions of risk. I finish by summarising commonalities across these studies.

**Teachers’ perceptions of risk in professional learning and change**

Research into teachers’ perceptions of risk is premised on the inevitability of risk in educational change as existing practices are replaced with uncertain new ones (Helsing, 2007; Ponticell, 2003). Not only is there uncertainty for teachers connected to the learning of new knowledge and skills, but studies have also linked increased uncertainty in the context during change (Reio, 2005). Some researchers have explicitly linked risk in educational change for teachers (Howard, 2009, 2011; Ponticell, 2003; Reio, 2005; Reio & Lasky, 2007) and principals (Starr, 2012).

Ponticell (2003) investigated enablers and inhibitors of teacher risk-taking behaviour during an innovation using a predominantly psychological perspective. Her study employed Yates & Stone’s (1992) definition of risk as loss, significance of loss and uncertainty (as cited in Ponticell, 2003). She found teachers’ uncertainty and perceptions of loss, and its significance influenced their risk-taking behaviour. Uncertainty came from mixed messages about the change, unclear or inconsistent expectations of teachers and unstable support from the central office.
Ponticell (2003) also found that teachers' emotions in response to decisions around loss were connected to their risk-taking behaviour. Unsurprisingly, positive emotions enhanced risk taking, whilst negative emotions such as fear of failure inhibited it. She concluded that the construct of emotion in risk needed further study. Ponticell's study also highlights that colleagues, students and other professionals influenced teacher risk taking, leading her to suggest that future research into teacher risk-taking behaviour should also include social and cultural aspects.

Reio and Lasky (2007) extended Ponticell's (2003) work by including a socio-cultural lens with a cognitive motivational view of risk. Although Reio and Lasky found teacher talk of possible gain rather than perception of loss, they highlighted that "an openness to learning through risk taking promoted a norm of experimentation" (2007, p. 27). This work emphasises that teacher risk taking is influenced not only by individual factors but also social factors such as interactions with others and cultural norms within the school.

Few studies have explicitly explored teachers’ perceptions of risk (Howard, 2009, 2011) in situations of educational change. Howard's (2009) doctoral study considered teachers’ perceptions of risk and their judgment of the risk’s acceptability or unacceptability during the integration of technology into their classroom. Howard's work is premised on teachers valuing and being motivated by “high student achievement”. She explored both individual and socio-cultural factors. She claims that teachers judge a risk in relation to its effect on the “quality of their teaching and subsequently student learning” (Howard, 2009, p. 176), or as she later states in terms of risk theory, “in relation to overall cost or benefit to student achievement and learning” (Howard, 2011, p. 265).

Howard (2009, 2011) used survey data to classify her teachers by their espoused likelihood to take risks, yet interestingly her results showed that the teachers perceived the same risks. The commonly reported perceived risks were associated with loss of time for preparation and class time to teach the required content; loss of classroom control; and decreased student achievement. The teachers, however, differed on how they evaluated the risk’s acceptability based on their personal feelings associated with technology and its perceived value in teaching. For example, the expectation of improved learning mitigated perceived loss of classroom control for the teachers classified as more likely to take risks, whereas the low risk takers saw this as a reason not to act. Howard also found a "strong link between teachers' preferred teaching method and their potential to take risks" (Howard, 2009, p. 254).
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From a cultural theory of risk perspective, Howard was able to show that teachers within a subject department shared similar views around applicability of ICT use to their teaching, and this determined their willingness to change their teaching practices. At the school level, teachers were more willing to change if the changes were an expected and agreed part of the school culture. Her study highlights and supports Reio and Lasky’s (2007) view that school culture needs to be considered alongside individual factors in the formation of teachers’ perceptions of risk.

Hall and Hord (2015) in their book Implementing Change: Patterns, Principles, and Potholes” discuss “Stages of Concern” (SoC), an instrument they developed in the 1970s with colleagues. The SoC includes a questionnaire to measure a person’s concerns about change, where concern is considered broadly as someone’s perceptions or “ruminations” about the effects of change (Hall & Hord, 2015, p. 85). Seven categories make up the stages of concern. Concerns are posited to follow an idealised “quasi-developmental path” (Hall & Hord, 2015, p. 87) through the process of change. Concerns start as unrelated to the change; move to a focus on self, with a concern over one’s ability to make the required changes, and concerns about the impact of the changes on them; followed by concerns about the task; then finally, concerns over the wider impact of the changes on others. They hypothesise that there may be a “conglomeration of concerns” (Hall & Hord, 2015, p. 88) at any one time, but that some concerns may be more intense at different times. Lack of development through the stages is explained by implementation factors such as insufficient time, an inappropriate choice of innovation and leadership-related issues of the innovation.

Hall and Hord’s (2015) notion of concern has similarities to how I conceptualise perceptions of risk in this research. Their future focus on concerns as thoughts and feelings about possible consequences of an issue or task is similar to the future focus of risk perception. However, perceptions of risk are not conceptualised as occurring in stages like SoC but are related to uncertainty for each future event, acknowledging a dynamic rather than developmental process.

Saunders (2012) employed the SoC questionnaire in her research into teachers’ emotions in professional development for change. Her findings suggest that teachers experience concerns across different stages simultaneously, along with strong positive and negative emotional responses. The process appears cyclical rather than developmental. Although it is about teacher emotion and concerns, Saunders’ study also highlights the role of relationships in change, with trust supporting teacher risk taking.
Lastly, Le Fevre (2014) used a risk lens based on uncertainty and loss to understand differences in implementation of a literacy programme. Her findings suggest that despite the majority of teachers supporting the proposed changes, they did not engage in the new practices as they perceived a potential for greater loss than gain, in other words the level of risk was too high. The teachers identified deprivatising their practice, reducing dependency on existing textbooks and increasing the use of student voice as activities that they considered too risky to engage in. Loss in these activities was associated with fear of public failure, loss of control of students and loss of time.

Based on her findings, Le Fevre (2014) suggests that risk-related decisions and actions may relate to teachers acting to protect their identity. Le Fevre refers to Giddens’ (1991) term *ontological security* that is, our need to maintain our identity and sense of belonging, and Marris’ (1986) *conservative impulse*, to explain teachers’ actions as maintaining their identity in the school context. These concepts connect security and identity, both of which may be challenged during change.

**Key ideas from studies on risk in education**

There are a number of key ideas and issues identified in these studies that are relevant for my research. Although researchers are now connecting risk, uncertainty, change and emotion in research into risk in education, the studies do not have a clear conceptualisation of risk, often blurring perceptions of risk and risk taking. Perceptions of risk are different to risk-taking actions, yet closely connected. Le Fevre’s (2014) study highlights the intertwined and paradoxical nature of risk perceptions and risk taking on learning. On the one hand, high perceptions of risk can constrain and even prevent learning, while on the other hand, a level of risk taking is needed for learning. For the most part, the studies on risk focus on the consequences of risk-taking behaviour often using a cognitive frame or bias towards judgments about potential losses and gains. High risk is typically considered in terms of loss and gain, with greater loss resulting in lower engagement in change. This focus overlooks what has led to the loss versus gain decision and the possible emotional responses.

Uncertainty is inherent in change and perceptions of risk for teachers. The studies reviewed highlight some common factors that teachers were uncertain about, however the source or sources of uncertainty explored were more likely to be external to the teacher and were usually located in the change context. Uncertainty within teachers, that is, connected to one’s efficacy and vulnerability, was inferred or less explored.
Emotion, both positive and negative, is viewed as inseparable from risk and change and is seen as impacting on teachers’ actions. The reviewed studies showed that positive emotion enhanced risk taking (Howard, 2011; Ponticell, 2003). In contrast, negative emotion inhibited risk taking (Ponticell, 2003), risk acceptability (Howard, 2011), and impeded curiosity (Reio, 2011). However, unlike educational research into emotion that has framed emotion as a response to change that impacts on identity, decision-making and risk-taking actions, these studies on risk and risk taking in education were less likely to explore emotion or its effect on teacher identity. In the educational context, the role of emotion in perceptions of risk remains unclear.

There is overall agreement across the studies that context influences perception of risk, risk taking and emotion. Social and cultural factors within the school have been shown to interact and influence teachers’ risk-related actions (Le Fevre, 2014; Reio & Lasky, 2007; Saunders, 2012) with the perceived quality of social relationships with colleagues, students and leaders influencing teachers’ overall perceptions of risk. In addition supportive relationships, trust and a culture of experimentation and safety lowered risk and supported risk taking. Trust appeared to be a pre-condition of risk taking (Reio & Lasky, 2007).

This research focuses on perceptions of risk and risk taking actions as separate concepts that impact on each other. Perceptions of risk are enmeshed in the uncertainty of change, and are therefore positioned in the first instance at least, prior or antecedent to emotional responses that then impact on future actions. Of course, contextual factors and emotion influence the process throughout, highlighting the complexity to be captured in order to understand the risk perception process.

**Developing the Conceptual Framework**

In this section, I introduce sensemaking and framing. These two closely related theoretical lenses, along with risk theory discussed above, underpin the conceptual framework for this research. I use these theories to support an exploration of how teachers and leaders make sense of or frame the professional learning in which they are engaged. This work provides clues to the antecedent factors that influence perceptions of risk, as well as highlights the subsequent effect of these perceptions on teacher actions and the resultant impact on their learning. Sensemaking and framing are presented separately, however, they are conceptualised as interdependent and working seamlessly together. I conclude this literature review by presenting the conceptual framework that guides my research process.
Sensemaking

Sensemaking is posited to occur when the existing order of things is interrupted and trouble, or disorder, confusion and insecurity become apparent (Weick, 2010). A professional learning context for educational change interrupts the status quo for teachers when they are expected to engage with new knowledge and make changes to their existing practices. Professional learning can thus be explored as “an occasion for sensemaking” (Weick, 1995, p. 987).

Change is everywhere, yet we attempt to maintain order and control to make sense of our world. We prefer things to remain the same or have a ‘conservative impulse’ that drives us to ignore, avoid and interpret new experiences in terms of what we already know (Marris, 1986). We need to make sense of the world and “tolerate the unexplained but not the inexplicable” (Goffman, 1986, p. 30). Sensemaking theory provides an explanation as to how this happens.

Weick's definition of sensemaking as “order, interruption, recovery” (2009, p. 39) appears on the surface to suggest that sensemaking is a rather simple process of making sense of things that are different. People do this all the time, often very quickly. So what is sensemaking? Sensemaking has been defined more explicitly "as an active process of constructing meaning from present stimuli mediated by prior knowledge and embedded in the social context” (Sleegers, Wassink, van Veen, & Imants, 2009, p. 153). This definition hypothesises that people make sense of new and or ambiguous information through their pre-existing cognitive frameworks, past experiences and existing knowledge (Coburn, 2001; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002; Spillane, Reiser, & Gomez, 2006; Weick, 1995). Furthermore, they do it with others. Other researchers highlight that sensemaking is more about perception than facts: “sense-making is thus about connecting cues and frames to create an account of what is going on” (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010, p. 558).

Most scholars refer to the work of Karl Weick, an organisational theorist who has extensively explored the concept of sensemaking in organisations (Weick, 1995, 2005, 2009, 2010). In 1995, Weick proposed seven properties of sensemaking, namely: “identity, retrospect, enactment, social contact, ongoing events, cues, and plausibility” (p. 3). In later writings these are re-ordered by the acronym SIR COPE (Weick, 2009, 2010). These properties of sensemaking vary along a continuum related to how effectively they reduce ambiguity for the sense maker. These properties are discussed briefly below.
Sensemaking is predominantly interactive and social. Individual sensemaking does occur, but interaction enhances sensemaking (Coburn, 2001, 2006; Weick, 2005). In these interactions we “learn from one another but also because group interactions bring insights and perspectives to the surface that otherwise might not be made visible to the group” (Spillane et al., 2002, p. 406). More specifically, we use language to uncover what we think or talk things into existence (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005; Weick, 2009). Sensemaking also depends on where it happens (Coburn, 2001), reinforcing the need to consider social and cultural factors as influencing an individual's perceptions of risk.

Sensemaking begins from some standpoint or identity. Who we think we are shapes what we do and how others see us. Identity also depends on the context and people we are with (Weick, 2005). This property explains why individuals can make different sense of a situation depending on their identity at the time.

One of the key properties of sensemaking is in its retrospective viewpoint that “we always see a little too late what we have done and what its consequences are” (Weick, 2005, p. 60). Although we may think we plan before taking action, much of our action is informed by tacit knowledge. We act, reflect and make sense or justify these actions later. Perceptions of risks are perceived ahead of time based on sensemaking to date. Risk perceptions can also be attributed retrospectively as we reflect on the consequences of our actions. For Weick, the sense made of actions “justifies past actions and guides future actions” (Weick, 2010, p. 547).

Sensemaking is about using cues or information to reduce ambiguity, complexity and uncertainty. We select, ignore or are unaware of some cues amongst the myriad of available cues. This “selection” of cues is the essence of how sensemaking differs from interpretation. Weick emphasises ongoing attention to changing cues in order to create up-to-date plausible stories with sensemaking about making “sense out of an emerging pattern” (Weick, 2005, p. 58). Maintaining awareness of this ongoing flow of events allows the sense maker to remain open to updating and changing their story as new cues are processed and newer sense is made. Weick and colleagues posit that “people get better stories, but they will never get the story” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 415). Doubt is viewed positively, as this forces the sense maker to look for “better stories” rather than spend time searching for cues that support or justify their current sense (Weick, 2009, 2010).

Getting better stories and making sense of the world is about forming plausible interpretations rather than about accuracy or the notion that there is an accurate account. The
sense we make from ambiguous cues must also appear plausible for others we are with, if we want them to act. Sensemaking is about acting on our interpretations (Ford, Ford, & D'Amelio, 2008). This enactment is about what we do next (Weick et al., 2005). As a result of retrospective sensemaking, our actions are always a little ahead of our understanding of these actions. During any change there is the risk that our actions can make things worse, despite facilitating our understanding afterwards.

In a more recent paper, Weick (2010) discusses the quality of sensemaking by reappraising his original sensemaking of the 1984 Bhopal industrial gas leak disaster, published in 1988. There are three key ideas from this reappraisal that may assist in understanding leaders’ and teachers’ sensemaking of risk in educational change. Firstly, Weick speculates that the sense we make of an action, especially if we make it public, can limit future sensemaking and actions. In our search for meaning to deal with uncertainty and ambiguity we may settle for a “low bar for plausibility” (Weick, 2010, p. 549) and then spend time finding cues to justify this view rather than continuing to search for better quality cues.

Secondly, Weick distinguishes between stimuli-driven alertness, and schema-driven awareness: “Alertness is an effort to notice something that is out-of-place, unusual, or unexpected” (2010, p. 545), whereas awareness “is an effort to generate conjectures about what the anomaly might mean” (2010, p. 545). Weick maintains that both are important as we may “produce meaningless conjectures” (2010, p. 545) when we overlook important cues because we have no concepts or schema to suggest they are important and/or when our conceptualising is not connected to the cues.

Thirdly, Weick rethinks the link between emotion and sensemaking. In contrast to his previously “cold and cognitive” (2010, p. 545) account of the Bhopal disaster, he suggests that awareness and alertness may have been limited as a “consequence of negative emotion” (2010, p. 545). Emotion is now accepted to influence our sensemaking.

Maitlis and Sonenshein (2010) also discuss when and how shared meaning and emotion enable or inhibit sensemaking. Negative emotions such as fear, anxiety and frustration increase when there appears to be insufficient information to form plausible explanations, making the sense maker work out the problems for themselves (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010). These researchers suggest that negative emotions of guilt or shame focus our attention inward rather than on the problem at hand. On the other hand, positive emotions such as excitement,
hope and relief may provide energy, but may also mean that some cues are overlooked. The role of emotion in decisions and actions is once again highlighted.

The constructivist basis of sensemaking theory works well for understanding perceptions of risk where we attempt to make ongoing sense of our changing environment by reducing uncertainty and ambiguity.

**Framing**

Frame theory and frame processes are relevant to conceptualising teachers’ perceptions of risk in professional learning. Frames are considered an inherent part of sensemaking. In essence, sensemaking involves connecting cues and frames (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010) with the frame(s) used, reflecting the sense maker’s underlying beliefs, values, past experiences and current knowledge (Coburn, 2006; Sleegers et al., 2009). Frames act like a cognitive organiser - organising experiences, connecting cues and providing boundaries to what is noticed or ignored, thereby defining what is happening (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010). The frame used not only biases the selection of cues and therefore the sense made, but also biases the actions that are taken in response to these cues (Coburn, 2006; Perri, 2005). In this way, teachers’ and leaders’ personal frames determine how they make sense of their professional learning experiences, thus potentially contributing to their formation of perceptions of risk.

The concept of frames and frame theory is widely recognised as evolving from Goffman’s 1974 studies of human interaction (Benford & Snow, 2000; Desrosiers, 2012; Miethe, 2009; Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986). Goffman posited that frames allow the user “to locate, perceive, identify, and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences” (1986, p. 21). Additionally, more than one frame is likely to be invoked at any one time in order to work out what is going on (Goffman, 1986). Typically we are unaware of the frames we use; however, at times when we experience such things as surprise, confusion and interruption of the status quo, we become conscious of our frames (Goffman, 1986), forcing us to question, re-evaluate or reframe our thinking.

Frames are posited to be socially constructed (Coburn, 2006), shaped by and shaping our experiences with others. Framing is an active social process between multiple individuals in a context. In this way, frames are dynamic, personal and situated (Sleegers et al., 2009), with individuals likely to invoke more than one frame for the same situation.
Frames are also formed and contested through access to knowledge (Coburn, 2001). In her 2001 study in one US school, Coburn highlighted that, as a result of attending external meetings, leaders accessed greater knowledge than their teachers. Thus, teachers had less knowledge and possibly greater uncertainty about the changes than their leaders, making it difficult for them to contest leaders’ messages or make informed judgments. Additionally, leaders selected the knowledge they shared, thus they “privileged certain messages over others” (Coburn, 2001, p. 161).

Frames are not only personal, but they also function at the wider collective level. Social movement theorists apply framing concepts and frame analysis from a strategic communication viewpoint focusing on the processes by which frames can be influenced by others (Johnston, 2009; Miethe, 2009; Snow et al., 1986). Benford and Snow (2000) identify three core collective action frames: diagnostic, prognostic and motivational. In brief, the diagnostic frame identifies the problem and attributes responsibility for it; the prognostic frame involves finding solutions to the identified problem; and the motivational frame involves developing motivation in others to act (Benford & Snow, 2000). Collective frames interact with personal frames thereby impacting on the sense made and the subsequent action.

Coburn (2006) applied collective action frames and frame theory at an organisational level to understand how framing happened in a school during the implementation of a new reading programme. She found that how the school defined the problem in the beginning shaped the implementation of the programme and ultimately determined the actions the teachers took. She concluded that how the problem is framed “opens up and legitimates certain avenues of action and closes off and delegitimizes others” (Coburn, 2006, p. 344).

Frames are dynamic and can be altered by social processes. In Coburn’s 2006 study, teachers and leaders engaged in framing activities to change others’ views. These framing activities appeared to influence teachers’ sensemaking that subsequently shaped “how they approached and experimented with classroom practices” (2006, p. 371), highlighting the connection between individual and collective frames and the actions people take.

In the context of educational change, the notion of diagnostic or problem frames can be applied to issues or situations where labels or frames are used to make sense of them and to consider possible solutions. For example, in addition to collective frames being applied by leaders and teachers to the overarching reasons for professional learning, problem framing can be applied to other problems such as non-engagement in change. Uncovering the problem
frame inevitably exposes where responsibility is believed to lie. The use of problem frames that blame teachers are thought to “evoke emotional states that restrict openness, cooperation and risk taking” (Forsyth et al., 2011, p. 139).

Collective frames do not necessarily resonate or reflect an individual’s beliefs. Individuals who hold competing frames may or may not contest collective frames. A lack of a shared understanding or clarity in framing a problem can lead to different solutions or prognostic frames invoked by individuals (Coburn, 2001). Even though there may be apparent agreement on a problem frame, this does not guarantee that the solution will be framed the same way (Coburn 2006; Sleegers et al., 2009). In addition to competing frames, frames may also be contested due to the uncertainty surrounding the problem as well as ambiguity over the interpretation and possible solution (Benford & Snow, 2000). Social movement theorists contend that frames can be purposefully manipulated, contested and altered via deliberate, strategic processes. At this level, frames and framing are considered as politically driven processes used by people to “achieve a specific purpose” (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 624).

Risk researchers have used framing in risk analysis. Tversky & Kahneman (1981) proposed prospect theory with decision frames, posited as a way to explain people’s judgments about risks and why their decisions may lead to risk aversion, risk neutrality or risk seeking actions. For them, frames ultimately influence perceptions of risk: “The frame that a decision-maker adopts is controlled partly by the formulation of the problem and partly by the norms, habits, and personal characteristics of the decision-maker” (1981, p. 453).

To summarise, frames provide a way to conceptualise the cognitive organisers that individuals use to make sense of their experiences and the actions they take. Frames help us understand why different individuals notice some cues and not others and respond in diverse ways in the same context. The social construction of frames highlights the importance of considering collective and individual frames and the effect of their interaction. As reviewed earlier, theorists frame risk in multiple ways. It is therefore expected that teachers may also frame risk in diverse ways, thus impacting differently on their actions and learning.

Sensemaking and framing are now combined with risk theory into a conceptual framework for this research.

**Conceptual framework**

I now explain the development of the conceptual framework from the material reviewed earlier, and then present the conceptual framework. To reiterate, theorising about risk outside
of education occurs on a continuum from viewing risk as an objective entity to a radical construction of reality (Aven & Renn, 2009; Zinn, 2008). While there is agreement that risk exists in education, there is little research on either risk or risk perception (Reio, 2005), or how to conceptualise it, with current studies typically blurring risk taking with risk perception. With this absence of a clear theoretical construct to follow, a conceptual framework, underpinned by a worldview where meaning is socially constructed, is presented. This framework guided this research, including research questions, data collection and data analysis (Yin, 2009).

The three theoretical perspectives, risk, sensemaking and framing, inform this conceptual framework. Collectively they focus on the individual, psychological, social and contextual factors that contribute to participants’ perceptions of risk, their actions and the impact on learning. The framework utilises a constructivist perspective that assumes risk perceptions are mental constructions, influenced individually, socially and contextually. Accordingly, I have conceptualised risk around uncertainty, based on the work of Aven and Renn (2009) who theorise risk as “uncertainty about and severity of the events and consequences (or outcomes) of an activity with respect to something that humans value” (p. 6). I hypothesised that by focusing on teachers’ uncertainty surrounding their professional learning, I would gain access to their perceptions of risk and associated emotions, and in turn uncover connections to their risk-related actions and how these impacted on learning. I expected high uncertainty to be connected to high risk, however I was aware that low uncertainty did not necessarily mean low risk as severity of consequences affects our judgments (Aven & Renn, 2009). For example, the possibility of an observer sharing confidential information about a teacher’s lesson may be low, but negative consequences to employment conditions may be perceived as severe.

Sensemaking (Weick, 1995, 2005, 2009, 2010), the second theoretical perspective, considers how people engage in ongoing meaning construction from the available cues in the environment to make better or more plausible stories for themselves as they attempt to reduce the ambiguity and uncertainty in a situation. Individuals construct perceptions of risk and take action based on their identity, the current context including whom they are with, what has gone before and the frames they invoke. This process involves the ongoing interaction of cognition and emotion. Sensemaking is about connecting cues (what is ‘seen’ or noticed from the myriad of possible cues) to frames (theories of the world) to make sense of what is going on (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010).
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Framing, the third theoretical perspective, is closely aligned to sensemaking. Frames or theories of the world organise and bias what we notice, thus resulting in different sensemaking by individuals. It is plausible that different individuals will form different perceptions of risk towards the same event.

The conceptual framework that guided this research is presented in Figure 2.1.

![Conceptual framework of perceptions of risk](image)

Figure 2.1. Conceptual framework of perceptions of risk

The conceptual framework underpinning this research is formed by combining the three theoretical perspectives and Aven and Renn’s (2009) conceptualisation of risk as uncertainty, discussed above. Thus, for this research, I have broadly operationalised perceptions of risk as an individual’s overall judgment (assessment and evaluation) of the possible risks (uncertainty connected to a future event and its consequences) and how these risks could affect them. Perceptions of risk are antecedent to risk-taking actions. Sensemaking binds the risk perception and risk-related action processes together, emphasising the ongoing and dynamic nature of an individual’s sense making of the possible risks in their environment, as well as the responses or enactments an individual may make throughout the process.

Perceptions of risk are the result of both cognition and emotion-based assessments and evaluations. Using this framework, the individual makes a judgment about the possible risks based on their assessment and evaluation, and then responds to the risk perception, both cognitively and emotionally. These responses impact on decision-making and learning. In other words, the individual responds and takes actions based on their perceptions of risk. The individual ‘makes sense’ of this sequence of events and uses this ‘new sense’ to update their earlier perception of risks, possibly taking further actions prior to the event that is the focus of the perceptions of the risk.
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For example, a possible scenario in the context of new professional learning and educational change is that a teacher (a) may perceive some uncertainty around what they are expected to show in their upcoming classroom observation or professional learning event; (b) may be uncertain about the consequences of a less than successful event on their reputation; and/or (c) may or may not feel concerned about this uncertainty. The teacher may respond to these concerns by asking other teachers what they are doing and then prepare for the observation, concurrently reducing his or her perceptions of risk connected to the impending observation and its consequence. Alternatively, the teacher may look for ways to avoid the observation after forming perceptions of risk connected to uncertainty about the consequences of possible perceived failure. It is also plausible that the teacher may not perceive the professional learning experience as a potential risk. The teacher’s response impacts positively or negatively on their learning. The teacher then brings the sense they made from this experience into their subsequent events and ongoing action.

Perceptions of risk focus on uncertainty connected to a future event and its consequences. As such they have not actually occurred and are mental constructions based on past experiences, beliefs, thoughts and emotion. Although the individual considers or anticipates both positive and negative outcomes, perceptions of risk tend to focus on the uncertainty connected to a negative consequence.

A perception of risk lens focuses on antecedent factors to a potential risk event and its perceived consequences, should the perceived risk eventuate. A risk lens, sensemaking and framing provides an alternative, yet plausible approach to look more closely at teachers’ responses and actions in professional learning. These actions ultimately impact positively or negatively on teacher learning.
Chapter 3: Methodology

This research is a qualitative exploratory case study of teachers’ perceptions of risk in professional learning for change. It is based on in-depth interviews with 21 teachers across three schools, supported by interviews with 14 leaders and 4 facilitators (professional developers).

This chapter begins by stating the research questions and rationale for the methodological approach and use of a case study research strategy. Next, I describe and justify the research design, followed by information about the context and the participants. I then report the methods used for data collection and analysis. Lastly, I consider ethical considerations and describe the strategies I employed to address issues of trustworthiness and credibility.

The research questions asked were:

- What is the influence of perceptions of risk on teachers’ sensemaking of professional learning and their subsequent actions?
- How do the actions of others mediate teachers’ perceptions of risk and sensemaking of professional learning?
- How do the leaders and professional learning facilitators make sense of teachers’ emotional responses and actions in professional learning?

Rationale for Methodology

The purpose of this research was to understand the phenomenon of teachers’ perceptions of risk and how they influence teachers’ sensemaking and actions in professional learning for change. I was interested in understanding how perceptions of risk formed, what influenced their formation, the sense teachers made of them, along with teachers’ responses and actions, and impact on their learning. This research sought to understand this phenomenon necessitating a research approach that allowed in-depth access to teachers’ thoughts, feelings and actions. I was also interested in how others, that is principals, school leaders, and facilitators, made sense of teachers’ responses and actions in the professional learning. Thus, the selection of a qualitative research approach that focused on “learning how individuals experience and interact with their social world, the meaning it has for them” (Merriam, 2002, p. 4) was fundamental for this research. This approach aligned with my purpose of
understanding perceptions of risk from the teachers’ or participants’ perspective (Merriam, 2002).

In a qualitative approach, the researcher studies the phenomenon in its natural setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Merriam, 1998, 2002; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). The researcher is situated close to the phenomenon rather than in a controlled or experimental environment and is therefore able to observe and gain a greater understanding of the contexts the phenomenon occurs in. In this research I spent time in schools observing teachers as they made sense of their new professional learning programmes.

Qualitative research is not only conducted in the natural setting but also the researcher is the primary data collection and data analysis instrument (Merriam, 1998). In this way, the researcher acts as an interpreter making sense of the data throughout the research process (Stake, 1995). The researcher’s role is to interact with the participants in their natural context, getting as close as possible to phenomenon which in this research involved inquiring into the participants’ response to the professional learning. In the words of Miles et al., qualitative data “with their emphasis on people’s lived experiences, are fundamentally well suited for locating the meanings people place on the events, processes, and structures of their lives and for connecting these meanings to the social world around them” (2014, p. 11). This close access to participants’ thoughts and feelings could not readily be accessed using survey or questionnaire methods.

Another key characteristic of qualitative research relates to the use of an inductive research strategy as a way of finding theory that is based in the data (Merriam, 1998, 2002). For Merriam, “the meaning of the process or experience constitutes the knowledge to be gained” (1998, p. 4). In this research, I used a research process that was both inductive and grounded in the data, yet also guided by a conceptual framework formed deductively from the available literatures (see Chapter 2 for a discussion of the conceptual framework).

Finally, qualitative research is richly descriptive with the potential to reveal complexity, favouring words over numbers (Merriam, 2002; Miles et al., 2014). The end product of this research is a rich description of teachers’ perceptions of risk in professional learning for change illustrated with excerpts from interview transcripts that allow the reader to make their own generalisations.

Qualitative researchers bring a “set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 19). This interpretive stance
underpins the decisions made throughout the research process (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Miles & Huberman, 1984). This research is positioned within a constructivist-interpretive worldview, one of four general interpretive paradigms identified by Denzin and Lincoln (2000). This worldview assumes that knowledge is socially constructed “rather than awareness of an external reality” (Stake, 1995, p. 170). This view of knowledge assumes that reality is what we have come to believe through our experience. New knowledge construction is linked to existing knowledge, therefore is essentially personal. Consequently, this view accepts multiple realities, and therefore multiple interpretations of realities exist (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Merriam, 2002). Thus a constructivist researcher seeks to gain an understanding of these multiple perspectives by interacting with participants in the context, at the same time aware “that their own background shapes their interpretation” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 29).

This worldview of knowledge as “socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world” (Merriam 2002, p. 3) aligns with the conceptualisation of perceptions of risk as socially mediated ‘mental constructions’ rather than objective entities (Aven & Renn, 2009; Zinn, 2009). This more constructivist view of risk perceptions clearly fits within a qualitative research process. Next the strategy of inquiry, selected to align with the purpose of the research and used to determine the data collection and analysis methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Yin, 2009) is discussed.

**Strategy of inquiry: Qualitative case study**

A qualitative case study approach was selected as the best fit for gaining an in-depth understanding of teachers’ perceptions of risk in professional learning. Case study is difficult to define with little consensus between scholars over the definition of case study along with ambiguity over the use of *case* (Grünbaum, 2007; Merriam, 1998). For the purposes of this research I refer to the broad definition of case methodology as studying a “phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 28). Phenomenon in this research refers to *teachers’ perceptions of risk in professional learning*.

As well as aligning with a qualitative research approach, the following criteria presented by Yin (2009) were used to determine the appropriateness of a case study as the strategy of inquiry in this research. Yin states that case study methodology is appropriate when “how or why questions are being asked about a contemporary set of events, over which the investigator has little or no control” (2009, p. 13), and when there is a “desire to allow
investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life” (Yin, 2009, p. 4). Furthermore the phenomena are best studied in real time within their natural context thereby maintaining the complexity of the phenomena (Yin, 2009, 2010).

This research met these criteria for a case study approach for the following reasons. First, the purpose of the research was to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers’ perceptions of risk and how they influenced teachers’ sensemaking of professional learning. Second, I was interested in a holistic understanding of perceptions of risk as they occurred for teachers in schools in real time in response to the professional learning. Perceptions of risk are a complex phenomenon influenced by a range of personal and contextual factors that cannot be separated from their context. A case study approach maintained the complex connections between the phenomenon (teachers’ perceptions of risk in professional learning) and the context, and also allowed this complexity to be captured as it occurred in its natural context (Yin, 2009).

**Defining the case**

One key feature that case study methodologists agree on is for the case to be bound or delimited with the researcher ruling things in and ruling others out (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). The *case* in this research is the phenomenon of teachers’ perceptions of risk in professional learning, with teachers in schools the subject of that phenomenon. Although the teachers were across three school sites they were treated collectively as teachers within the wider professional learning context for change, therefore this research is considered a holistic single exploratory (Yin, 2009) case study of teachers’ perceptions of risk in professional learning.

This case was bounded by the phenomenon, place and time. The phenomenon was bound by focusing on teachers’ perceptions of risk directly connected to this professional learning. This clear focus foregrounded my attention while in the field and kept competing themes and other foci such as leaders’ perceptions of risk to the background.

Additionally, the case was bounded by place and time as only schools participating in their initial year of professional learning with an external facilitator were considered. Two schools participated in the first year (Year One) followed by a third school the next year (Year Two). Teachers were also bound as those participating predominantly as teachers with a facilitator in the professional learning. Teachers who were not involved in the professional learning were ruled out.
The Research Design

The selection of a qualitative case study approach guided the research design, especially the data collection and data analysis methods as well as the write up format. Stake (2005) suggests there are “many many ways to do case studies” (p. xii). The research design of this research is illustrated in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1. Illustration of the research design

This design highlights the case, the sample of teachers from three schools, and the research process over time. The case, teachers’ perceptions of risk in professional learning, is represented by the apricot coloured box. The teachers within the three schools are conceptualised as a bound group or instance of the case. Arrows represent the sequence across time. Additionally others, that is, principals, school leaders and facilitators in the three schools, were bound as a group to provide data on the sense they made of teachers’ actions and responses to the professional learning. These data added to the overall understanding of the case.

This research began with a review of relevant literature. However, with an absence of a clear theoretical construct of risk or perceptions of risk in education, I developed a broad conceptual framework using literatures beyond education centred on the concept of risk and uncertainty to guide this research. This framework provided parameters to focus my data collection and data analysis processes. The framework was sufficiently broad to meet the exploratory purpose of the research.

I had initially anticipated that teachers’ perceptions of risk might differ significantly across schools; therefore I included more than one school into the design for possible comparative analysis. However, strong themes identified from inductive analysis and interpretation of the teacher data across both schools in Year One led me to abandon comparative analysis and focus on teachers as one group. An emergent design, responsive to ongoing findings, is acceptable within a qualitative research approach (Creswell, 2013). For example, the theme
of vulnerability identified from analysis of the teacher interview data in Year One led to the revised conceptual framework and subsequent refining of data collection and analysis in School 3. This framework revision is illustrated in Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2. Illustration of the development of the revised conceptual framework

Data from School 3 were added to the existing data and not treated as an embedded sub-unit (Yin, 2009). This data, along with re-analysis of data from Schools 1 & 2, were interpreted within this revised conceptual framework. This refinement of the conceptual model and deliberate refocusing of the data collection and analysis processes informed the construction of an emergent theoretical model of the risk perception process. This model is presented in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

The Research Context

This research is located within the professional learning contexts of three New Zealand schools. Teachers in these schools were expected to engage with the professional learning opportunities that were provided to support and assist them to change their practice in order to improve student outcomes. I describe the wider professional learning context, the schools and the participants next. Professional learning (PL) refers to a programme of learning aimed at changing teacher practice.

The wider professional learning context

This research was situated within a wider study that probed practitioners' perceptions of risk during participation in a national Ministry of Education professional learning contract. The schools in the wider study worked with professional learning facilitators (n=41). The facilitators were involved in their own professional learning around risk and learning.

The facilitators, employed by a New Zealand professional learning provider, delivered professional learning programmes funded by the Ministry of Education to schools. These programmes, designed to achieve substantial, sustainable shifts in valued student outcomes,
specifically targeted the achievement of the one in five students who, traditionally and currently are underserved by the education system. The content of the PL delivered by the facilitators was focused on the use of assessment to inform teaching and improve learning. The professional learning delivered in each school is based on an action plan co-constructed by the facilitator and leaders in each school. A range of learning opportunities is formulated between the school and the facilitator to meet the individual school’s needs. Schools 1 and 3 were part of this option.

Professional learning in this contract is also delivered as a flexible, shorter-term option where the facilitation targets an identified need. It is specific support designed to improve the school's capabilities to implement actions that improve outcomes for priority students. School 2 was involved in this option. Across both options, the professional learning events selected for teachers and leaders is specific to the school.

**The schools**

Descriptive data provided about the schools and the participants in this research is deliberately broad to maintain anonymity for both the schools participants and facilitators. School data was not used comparatively in the analysis.

This research was located in three New Zealand schools, one primary (Years 1-6); one intermediate (Years 7&8); and one secondary school (Years 7-15). All schools in the year of inclusion in the research were classified as Decile 2. Each decile contains approximately 10% of schools and ratings reflect the socio-economic community of the school. The ratings range from Decile 1, with the highest proportion of students in low socio-economic backgrounds to Decile 10 with the lowest proportion (Education Review Office, 2016).

**School 1- Medium city primary school (Years 1-6)**

Professional learning is not new for this school, having been engaged in a range of PL contracts in the last few years. The current PL was the major focus of professional learning in the school. The principal was active in the PL, participating as a teacher with a small group of students and as a leader. This principal visited classrooms, attended PL departmental and staff meetings, and talked to teachers about their involvement in the PL. There were high expectations of teachers to engage in the PL.

There was a continuing focus on the PL between facilitator visits through informal classroom walkthroughs and team meetings as well as informal discussions amongst the teachers and
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leaders. Teachers were expected to reflect on their PL-related learning and undertake readings connected to the PL. There was visible evidence of the professional learning in classrooms, staffroom and in teachers’ conversations.

The facilitator visited the school twice each term for three days duration. During this time all teachers were observed in their classrooms and participated in a feedback conversation on this observation. The facilitator ran full staff meetings and PL leader meetings each visit. Teachers were videoed at the start and end of the year as part of their PL to provide baseline and improvement-related data. Video recording was a new practice in this school. Teachers co-constructed their own professional learning plan with the facilitator within the constraints of the programme delivered.

The facilitator included talk about risk with the teachers during the year. In the first staff meeting the facilitator introduced constructs about risk using a children’s book that was referred to at other times. In total I made 34 visits to School 1.

School 2- Small rural secondary school (Years 7-13)

This school was concurrently participating in a number of other PL initiatives. Teachers were familiar with classroom observations of their practice through another continuing PL initiative. This and other factors led the principal to change to the flexible shorter-term option with a focus on strengthening teacher capability to analyse and use assessment data to inform decision-making and monitor improvement plans.

During the facilitator’s visits, teachers had individual coaching sessions, worked towards individual goals and were involved in self-paced implementation of formative assessment strategies. The PL included teachers conducting their own research on a related topic such as peer assessment, and presenting their findings to the staff. The facilitator used a web-based tool to maintain focus on the PL between visits. Some teachers engaged with the tool. Each visit, the facilitator ran full staff meetings and met with the leader in charge of the PL.

During the first visit the facilitator spoke with all teachers to begin relationship building and organise learning goals. During these conversation the facilitator deliberately asked about risk and learning. The principal was not directly involved with this PL, with a senior leader assigned responsibility for this and other PL.

The facilitator visited the school to work with teachers for 12 days across four visits. One planned three-day visit was cancelled due to facilitator illness. In total I visited School 2 for
13 days, all but one with the facilitator. Data from this school contributed to exploring teachers’ perceptions of risk in PL and its impact on learning in a context where PL events were regarded as lower risk.

School 3- Large city intermediate school (Years 7 & 8)

Professional learning is also an on-going commitment for this school with the school involved in a number of initiatives for groups of teachers. The PL in this research was school wide with all teachers expected to participate. The larger size of this school warranted two facilitators, both of whom provided informed consent. They visited the school twice each term for two days at a time. Teachers were split into two groups working with one facilitator. The facilitators ran full staff meetings, teacher-only days and PL middle-leader meetings each visit. They also met with the principal and leader in charge of the PL for planning and progress discussions. The principal was involved with the PL by attending all staff meetings, teacher only days and PL leadership meetings. A senior leader was responsible for the day-to-day coordination of the PL.

Both facilitators spoke to individual teachers about concepts of risk and mentioned risk-related concepts in staff meetings when appropriate. The teachers reported some discussion about the PL between facilitator visits. I made 23 visits to School 3.

The participants

Teachers, leaders and facilitators participated in this research. All participants volunteered and provided informed consent for the research. Seven teachers from each school formed the data set of 21 teachers. Their teaching experience ranged from first year teachers to those with 30 or more years of experience reflecting a range of prior teaching experience. The participating teachers were spread across all student year groups except new entrants. Teacher data are reported collectively and not as embedded school sub-units (Yin, 2009). Leaders in this research were involved with the PL at different levels across the schools. Leaders’ teaching experience ranged from 6 years to more than 30 years. Leaders included three principals; nine school leaders, three directly (PL leaders) and six not directly involved in this PL; and two teachers who participated primarily as teacher-leaders in the PL.

The four facilitators were experienced educators with more than 30 years teaching service each. Three of the four facilitators had participated in professional learning on concepts of risk in change related to PL. They were also part of the wider study on risk. One facilitator
was new to the PL organisation and had not participated in the same amount of risk-related PL as the other three.

For the purpose of this research facilitators, principals and school leaders are collectively referred to as *others* consistent with the focus on teachers. At times they are referred to by position, for example, principal, when the data reflected notable differences by that position. At other times principals and school leaders are collectively referred to as leaders distinct from facilitators.

**The school-based professional learning events**

Professional learning involved teachers in events in addition to their regular school activities. Each school included different types of PL events in their programmes across the year. All three schools included full staff PL meetings, usually led by the facilitator(s) focused on knowledge building related to the current PL focus. These meetings were well attended by teachers in all schools with leader attendance varying across schools.

Classroom observations of teacher practice were conducted in two schools. These occurred in person and/or video-recorded. These observations focused on an agreed aspect of the teacher’s new learning. For in-person observations, the facilitator and a school leader, not a principal, observed the teacher for approximately 30 minutes using a pre-determined observation tool. At the end of the observation the school leader and facilitator collected student voice data by asking up to five students about their learning during the lesson. Typically the teacher, facilitator, and school leader met shortly after the observed lesson to discuss the lesson and develop teacher-learning goals for future observations.

The video-recorded lessons were implemented in different ways in the two schools. One school used video recording to track improvement, videoing baseline and end of year samples of lessons whereas another school used video recording in place of in-person observations. In both schools, the teacher organised the recording of their practice. Feedback sessions were conducted similarly to in-person observations however there were greater delays between the recorded lesson and the feedback meeting. As a result student voice data were not always collected.

Other PL events included one-to-one coaching by facilitators as requested, and presentations by teachers on aspects of the PL to colleagues in full staff meetings. Each school’s PL programme reflected their specific programme type and the decisions co-constructed between
leaders and facilitators in each school. The PL events that teachers were expected to participate in are listed in Table 3.1 by school.

Table 3.1 Professional Learning Events by School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PL Events</th>
<th>School 1</th>
<th>School 2</th>
<th>School 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom observations</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Term 1 only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Videoing recording of practice</td>
<td>Beginning &amp; end</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Ongoing from Term2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback meetings</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-1 coaching</td>
<td>By request</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>By request</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentations to staff</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Method

This section starts with an overview of the research methods used followed by sampling decisions, data collection, and data analysis processes. The conceptual frame (Yin, 2009) guided data collection and data analysis methods and ensured these methods collectively maintained a clear focus on the case.

Overview

The research took place across two consecutive years, with Schools 1 and 2 in Year One and School 3 in Year Two. All schools were in their initial year of a new PL with an external PL facilitator. The participants included 21 teachers, (14 female and 5 male); 14 leaders (9 female and 5 male); and 4 female facilitators. A summary of participant data is displayed in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 Participant Data Across the Three Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School 1</th>
<th>School 2</th>
<th>School 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7 Teachers</td>
<td>7 Teachers</td>
<td>7 Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others:</td>
<td>Others:</td>
<td>Others:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Principal</td>
<td>1 Principal</td>
<td>1 Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 School leaders</td>
<td>3 School leaders</td>
<td>2 School leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 PL Facilitator</td>
<td>1 PL Facilitator</td>
<td>2 PL Facilitators</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*School leaders includes those directly involved (PL leaders) and those not directly involved in the PL.

Semi-structured interviews with participants were the primary data source. In total of 43 hours 18 minutes of interviews were transcribed. This included 19 hours 8 minutes from teachers, 17 hours 26 minutes from leaders, and 6 hours 35 minutes from facilitators.
Data collection

Qualitative case study researchers collect multiple sources of data such as interview, documents, field observations and artefacts to gain an in-depth understanding of the case (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Additionally, researchers collect case data over an extended period of time to maintain the complexity in the setting while also allowing for the phenomenon to evolve and change over time (Stake, 1995). I conducted interviews, spent considerable time in the schools observing and recording field notes, and collected documents relevant to the PL.

Yin (2010) encourages researchers to clarify complexity in the data collection. Within each school, data were collected from teachers directly involved in the PL and from others in the school context. Teacher data was primarily about them whereas leader and facilitator data were collected to corroborate teacher data and provide data on the case.

I assigned random codes for teachers (T1-21) and leaders (L1-14). As such principals are coded as leaders and referred to as “principal” only when relevant to the discussion. The four facilitators are referred to generically as facilitators with no identifiers. These actions have been taken to reduce the likelihood of participants being identified. References to gender are also removed except for facilitators, who were all female.

Interviews.

Semi-structured interviews were used to capture individual teacher voice of the sense they made of their changing environment and possible formation of perceptions of risk in the PL. This “transparent window on their world” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 95) accessed participants’ thoughts and feelings about uncertainty. The interviews were predominantly retrospective which aligned with sensemaking theory.

Interviews were conducted twice for participants where possible. A summary timeline of the interviews with participants is shown in Figure 3.3. Initial interviews (Time 1) occurred close to gaining informed consent, explaining the extended timeframes. The second interview (Time 2) occurred at the end of the school year.
Figure 3.3. Summary timeline showing timing of interviews by participant group and school.

In the first year, interviews in Schools 1 and 2 were semi-structured and exploratory, based on the conceptual framework. In the third school, in Year Two, the emerging themes in the conceptual framework were deliberately checked, refined and further explored for disconfirming evidence. Samples of the interview protocols for the participants are included in Appendix B.

In general, teacher interviews focused on their perceptions of risk in the PL and possible impact of this on their learning. Leader and facilitator interviews focused on the sense they made of teachers’ responses and actions in the PL, teacher engagement, and their theories on teacher resistance and risk. Follow-up interviews at the end of each year checked for changes in participants’ perceptions over time. Two teachers and one school leader were interviewed only once due to unavoidable circumstances.

More specifically, teacher interviews occurred when the teacher consented and was available. In Year One semi-structured questions were used to explore the teacher’s current thinking about risk by probing their concerns and actions in PL and any impact on their learning, both prior and current. Teachers were encouraged to retell personal experiences and as a result the questions asked were responsive to their responses. Follow-up interviews at the end of the year checked for changes in their risk perceptions over time. In the second year, teachers in
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School 3 were asked questions that honed in on risk in professional learning, especially uncertainty and vulnerability. Teacher actions, feelings and impact on learning related to their PL events were probed. Follow-up interviews checked the emergent risk perception process model with participants.

Leaders and facilitators were asked similar interview questions to the teachers to inquire into their own concepts of risk in PL and their changes in thinking over the year. I probed for their understanding of risk as a concept rather than probing their personal perceptions of risk. They were also asked about possible links between risk and willingness for teachers trying new practices in PL. Facilitators were interviewed three times in the first year. In the second year leaders and facilitators in School 3 were probed for their existing views on vulnerability and teacher resistance to change. They were also shown the emergent risk perception process model and asked for feedback on whether it was plausible, and adequately explained their construct of risk. Their recommendations and comments were included in the emergent risk perception process model where relevant. The focus of interview questions by participants, year of research, and timing of interview is included in Appendix C. This summary table highlights the changes in question foci over time for participant groups.

All interviews were audio recorded and professionally transcribed verbatim. I checked all transcriptions with the audio recording for accuracy. Transcripts were then sent to the interviewee to check for meaning and edit material they deemed sensitive or did not want included in the research. I coded a total of 43 hours and 18 minutes of transcripts, including 19 hours of teacher data. Teacher interviews were generally shorter than leaders because they were fitted into school-wide breaks whereas leaders were interviewed when they were not teaching.

**Researcher observations in the field**

Field observations over the two years provided context and firsthand information (Creswell, 2013) for data interpretation. I ensured I was present for PL presentations and meetings and at other times when the facilitator was also present to enhance interpretation of the data. I did not observe teachers in their classrooms nor was I present for any PL lesson observation of teachers’ practice or their feedback meetings.

I also used my field observation notes to triangulate the different participants’ perspectives of events. For example, I checked for corroboration of teacher data with information gathered from attendance at PL meetings, leaders’ meetings and staffroom conversation.
Documents

I collected documents that were relevant to the PL from each school site. These provided context for all interviews and were also used to validate the participant’s accounts of their experiences. Documents added to the overall understanding of the context of the case.

Sampling decisions

This research utilised purposeful sampling whereby the sample is selected to “maximise what we can learn” (Stake, 1995, p. 4). Purposeful sampling starts by determining the criteria to match the purpose of the research (Merriam, 1998). The criteria for this research hinged on finding schools beginning a PL contract with an external facilitator. I believed that perceptions of risk might be more prevalent at the start of PL when everything was new and therefore more likely to contain uncertainty.

The sample of teachers needed for this research was contingent on gaining prior informed consent of the facilitator and then the school. I invited facilitators working within the wider PL study on risk to participate during their organisation’s end of year meeting. Four facilitators volunteered. I then approached schools that were commencing PL with these facilitators in 2013. Two schools consented to be involved in the first year.

School participants were volunteers from within the consenting schools. The principal introduced me to the teachers and school leaders at a staff meeting focused on the PL where I spoke about the research, the risk lens I was using to frame the research, and how to participate. Few teachers volunteered in the first instance from Schools 1 and 3. As a result, I spent additional time in these schools at the start to become known to the teachers. At these schools I asked for additional volunteers at subsequent whole staff PL meetings. As their familiarity with me grew, teachers expressed their willingness to be interviewed. Seven teachers from School 2 volunteered during my first visit to the school. All principals and 11 school leaders volunteered during my first visits to schools.

The criterion for the inclusion of teachers required them to be participating as teachers in the PL at the time of their first interview. The data from an initial interview with one volunteer teacher was excluded on these criteria. Teachers were not excluded based on their level of perceived risk. Extreme perspectives were used to highlight differences in the case phenomena. Thus, each teacher’s voice, irrespective of their level of perceived risk, was essential for a collective understanding of teachers’ perceptions of risk associated with their...
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PL experiences (Creswell, 2013). I interviewed all leaders (principals and school leaders) who volunteered whether directly or indirectly involved in the PL because I was exploring the sense they made as others to teachers’ responses to PL. This data relates to RQ3.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data analysis and interpretation in case study research is focused on identifying themes and recurring patterns across the data to provide a rich description of the case (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2009). This process involves data condensation to selectively focus the large amounts of data into stronger units (Miles et al., 2014) or greater levels of abstraction (Creswell, 2013).

Data analysis in this research involved both deductive and inductive processes (Creswell, 2013). Data analysis was deductively driven in the first instance by the conceptual model developed from the literature (Yin, 2009). The framework was revised and refined to include new themes identified inductively from the data (Creswell, 2013; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Yin 2009). A similar deductive-inductive iterative process was followed for building and extending the emergent risk perception process model.

Data were analysed concurrently with ongoing data collection. Additionally, as a result of the data being collected across three schools at different times over the two years, the data was in fact analysed sequentially, starting from the analysis of interview one data in School 1. I searched for predominant themes in this data about the case using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this way the sample of teachers increased cumulatively from seven to twenty one teachers.

The possibility that the data may have been specific to a school site rather than consistent with themes identified across the whole data set was something I paid consistent attention too. The sequential nature of data collection and analysis across the different school sites provided an opportunity for me to be alert to this possibility. However, as noted earlier, strong themes in the teacher data across both schools in Year One led me to abandon comparative analysis and focus on teachers as one group.

Data analysis and interpretation were treated similarly across the three research questions despite their different data sets. RQ1 and RQ2 used teacher data to understand their perceptions of risk and the impact on their learning. RQ3 used others’ data to understand their sensemaking of teachers’ responses and actions in the PL.
I followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase method of thematic analysis to analyse the collected data. These authors define thematic analysis as “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (2006, p. 79), that “involves the searching across a data set … to find repeated patterns of meaning” (2006, p. 86). Their process is recursive highlighting the iterative nature of analysis where the researcher continually returns to the data set as needed. Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six phases are listed in italics along with the actions taken:

1. *Familiarizing yourself with your data*: All transcripts were checked for accuracy against the recording; transcripts were read grouped by types of participants within schools; reread to focus on themes related to uncertainty and risk; noting other interesting ideas.

2. *Generating initial codes*: Initial codes were deductively developed from the conceptual model; coded using QSR NVivo 9 & 10 software; extracts of text assigned to more than one code when appropriate; new themes added as a result of the data.

3. *Searching for themes*: Graphic organisers were used to sort the nodes into sub-nodes; determine main themes and sub themes to carry into second year; ongoing checks with conceptual framework.

4. *Reviewing themes*: Each theme reviewed and refined; search for relationships across themes; reread all Year One teacher transcripts for missing or disconfirming data; modification of framework (revised conceptual framework).

5. *Defining and naming themes*: Compiled coding tables, abstracted from the data to higher levels and inclusive of the overall sub-theme. Examples of coding tables are included in Appendix D. These include a description of the code with extracts from actual interview transcripts.

6. *Producing the report*: Selected to focus report beyond description of the data and themes, and report risk process model.

Each group of teachers’ and others’ transcripts were analysed in a similar cyclic manner through Phases 1 to 5 beginning with relevance to teachers’ perceptions of risk. Subsequent analyses focused on other factors derived from the research questions such as impact of others and contextual factors.

Most themes were identified and coded by their surface or explicit meanings. This required the transcript to include a direct reference to the theme or sub-theme. A number of other
themes such as vulnerability were coded at a deeper more interpretive level for “latent thematic analysis” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). As a result, I considered the participant’s intent rather than surface features of their utterances. For example, I inferred deeper meanings from the words leaders used to determine their use of a risk or resistance frame based on my concepts of risk. As such these themes were “already theorised” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). Extracts were coded for more than one theme as appropriate.

New and/or more differentiated themes were added to the coding scheme as a result of refining the data collection for School 3 in the second year. As a result I returned to the data from the first year to recode for these newer coding categories such as feelings of vulnerability. I also checked the strong themes identified in the first year to enable further differentiation and abstraction of themes such as uncertainty, actions, and others’ framing (resistance/risk) of teachers’ actions and responses.

**Ethical Considerations**

I considered ethical issues throughout all stages of the research (Creswell, 2013), ensuring the research schools and participants were well informed and protected from exposure. I took particular care to safeguard participant and school identities throughout the research and writing up process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

The general principles of ethical considerations (Silverman, 2013) were addressed as follows:

- **Voluntary participation: and the right to withdraw:** All participants volunteered for the research after being well informed about the purpose of the research. They were provided with the right to withdraw. Consent was gained in a domino pattern beginning with facilitators, then schools and their leaders prior to speaking to teachers.

- **Protections of research participants:** Steps were taken to respect participants’ anonymity and safeguard confidentiality. Teachers and leaders shared personal detail with me trusting that the information would be confidential and used respectfully. Neither individuals nor schools are identified in this thesis other than by an identifier known only to me. Teachers were assigned random numbers e.g. Teachers 1-21, in the findings, irrespective of their schools. Also I have provided limited descriptive data about the participants and their schools to reduce the likelihood of them being
identified by readers. Data is stored on password protected computer files known only to me.

- Assessment of potential benefits and risks to participants: Steps were taken to avoid risks to participants. In addition to those above I made explicit that data provided by participants may not relate to PL in their current school. I sent transcripts to all interviewees to check for meaning and edit material they deemed sensitive or did not wish included in the research. I spoke with those teachers and leaders who requested more information about their confidentiality. Off the record comments were ignored.
- Obtaining informed consent: Participants were provided with as much information as possible about the research so that they could make an informed decision on their possible involvement. Site access was obtained from principals and chairpersons of Boards of Trustees prior to the school becoming involved.

I gained approval from the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee (UAHPEC) with an amendment to the ethics protocol for the wider research project (Reference number 3138). Copies of the participant information sheet and consent form for teachers are included as samples of the ethics protocols in Appendix E.

**Procedures to Address Trustworthiness and Credibility**

Researchers strive to have their work considered reputable by others in the research community. Qualitative researchers address validation issues differently to quantitative researchers. Whilst there exists a tension between the terminology used in quantitative and qualitative research, there is an expectation that the researcher can show that their work is trustworthy and credible from a qualitative perspective, or alternatively valid and reliable from a quantitative perspective (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2013).

Qualitative researchers, especially those employing constructivist worldviews, have considered trustworthiness and authenticity in place of internal and external validity (Creswell, 2013; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Many terms and perspectives have been suggested for use in qualitative research. For example, Lincoln and Guba (1985) established trustworthiness through credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. More recently Creswell (2013) has suggested that validation in qualitative research is better considered a process that “attempt[s] to assess the ‘accuracy’ of the findings as best described by the researcher and participants “ (p. 270). He also suggests that researchers use validation strategies to “document the ‘accuracy’ of their studies” (2013, p. 271).
In this research I employed six of the strategies suggested by Creswell (2013) to address validation issues. The strategies included:

- **Prolonged engagement and persistent observation.** I spent extended time in each school. I attended whole days or attended the PL meetings when the facilitator was working in the school (School 1: 34 visits; School 2: 13 days; School 3: 23 visits). During these visits I aimed to build trust with the teachers, observe the school culture, and become familiar with the routines especially around the PL. I also visited schools without the facilitator to conduct interviews at times that were suitable for the teachers and leaders. This prolonged time in the field increased my confidence in the accuracy of the findings and limited possible misinformation.

- **Triangulation.** I used multiple sources of evidence and methods to corroborate and triangulate the data. As a result of spending extended time observing in the schools I was able triangulate field observation evidence with interview data. Additionally I collected multiple participant perspectives across interview data. For example teachers and leaders reported the same event from their perspective with a participant’s emotional responses reported in different ways by different participants. These multiple perspectives contributed to understanding the case.

- **Researcher bias.** I attempted to keep my personal frames or biases in check throughout the research. While I was aware of focusing on perceptions of risk, I was also alert for participants who may not form perceptions of risk. See also section on researcher positioning below. Themes and findings are well supported by rich thick descriptions to address researcher bias.

- **Negative case analysis.** I refined the themes and or created new themes in response to disconfirming evidence as it was identified in the data. Recursive inductive and deductive processes during analysis and interpretation supported the validity of the findings. The use of frequency data also highlights the prevalence of a theme or sub theme. Additionally, I endeavouring to present “multiple perspectives and contrary findings” to “avoid only disclosing positive results” (Creswell, 2013, p. 80).

- **Rich, thick descriptions for transferability.** This case focused on the phenomenon of perceptions of risk in PL. I have provided rich thick descriptions about the themes identified in the data connected to the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Readers are able to use these descriptions to decide whether the claims can be applied in similar
contexts and settings. The themes are well supported by frequency data and illustrative excerpts from the transcripts in the findings.

- **Member checking for credibility.** Participants were asked to check transcripts for accuracy, which were changed on request. I checked my understanding of participants’ views from their initial interview in their final interviews as part of probing for changes in thinking over time. This reduced the chances of the researcher misinterpreting the participant’s views. Participants in School 3 checked the plausibility of the emergent risk perception process model. Suggestions were considered and changes made if indicated and supported by other evidence. For example, member checks resulted in theme labels and sub-theme changes on the emergent model.

Reliability of data in qualitative research often refers to processes connected to coding of the data (Creswell, 2013). In this research my initial coding scheme based on the conceptual framework was discussed with my supervisors prior to starting coding transcript data. Throughout the data coding process extensive quotes and my interpretations of them were examined, critiqued, and agreed upon with my supervisors. In situations where we did not agree those quotes were excluded. More quotes were discussed than are included in the thesis.

In addition, the emergent risk perception model was subject to ongoing critique and refinement with my supervisors. Alternate views and interpretations were sought and discussed leading to modifications where necessary.

**Researcher Positioning**

Interpretive qualitative research recognises that a researcher’s perceptions and understandings of the phenomena are influenced by their theories and beliefs (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2010). Thus, I acknowledge the impact of my personal theories, my presence, and the introduction of risk constructs into the site through my framing of the research from the outset. Additionally, facilitators’ introductions of risk talk with the teachers and the interview questions about risk are acknowledged to have potentially impacted on the research process through participants’ sensemaking processes.

Furthermore, my personal theories around teaching and professional learning informed by 30 years of experience in schools will have contributed to what was noticed and made sense of.
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On the one hand this may be considered a weakness or bias yet on the other hand my knowledge and experience allowed for a research design where data collection and data analysis were already nuanced by prior experience. As such I was “an interpreter in the field” (Stake, 1995, p. 8). Finally the completed thesis is acknowledged as my interpretation of the case (Creswell, 2013).

I was also aware that empathy and trust were essential before teachers would share what was on their mind (Merriam, 1998) and trust that the data would be used ethically. I deliberately spent time in the schools and considered all interactions with participants as impacting on the development of trust.

Limitations

Limitations are inherent in qualitative research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Researcher bias and sampling issues, two common limitations in qualitative research, have already been addressed earlier in this chapter.

I also acknowledge that the views provided by the participants are both reflective of that moment in time yet influenced by previous experiences through the processes of retrospective sensemaking (Weick, 1995). Therefore, they not only represent the participants’ current environment but all those gone before.

Additionally, by introducing risk constructs into the case study environment I have potentially increased the participants’ awareness of risk and have thereby increased the likelihood of privileging confirming data. I was aware of this possible confirmation bias and sought disconfirming evidence such as deliberately asking whether my questions created risk and listening for voices that reported no risk.

The selection of volunteer schools and participants potentially challenges the findings in this study. Additionally by selecting a case study approach, I had already defined the boundaries of the research. These boundaries centred on selection of schools that were in the first year of a formative assessment based professional learning programme with an external facilitator who had prior learning around the construct of risk in learning. Similarly the sample of volunteer participant’s voices in the research may or may not be different to those who are not represented in the findings. This sampling bias is a possible threat to the validity of the findings (Robinson & Lai, 2006).
The purpose of this exploratory case study was to understand if and how perceptions of risk contributed to teachers’ responses to professional learning for change. While the schools and participants may not be indicative of all schools and their teachers, the findings from the case study schools can be used to build theory in this under-theorised field and as such provide a starting point for further research into perceptions of risk in professional learning.

I recognise that a central limitation of this research relates to studying intangible concepts like perceptions of risk, uncertainty, trust and vulnerability. Attempting to capture and make explicit the micro-processes of sensemaking of risk for self and others remained an ongoing challenge. I made sense of the evidence that teachers, leaders, and facilitators were prepared to share.

Finally my bias towards exploring the presence of perceptions of risk, acknowledges that although three teachers reported no risk, I did not deliberately inquire into their reasons for the absence of perceived risk. Their narratives were accepted as indicative of the range of possible responses to uncertainty. It is possible that they will not view risk in any professional learning or that there were factors in either the PL, themselves or the context that may have contributed to the narratives they shared. Alternatively, future PL may create perceptions of risk for these teachers.
Chapter 4: Teachers’ Perceptions of Risk

In the next three chapters I report six key findings from this exploratory case study organised by research question. Chapter four addresses research question one, which reports on the teachers’ perceptions of risk in their professional learning, their responses, and the impact on their learning. Chapter five addresses research question two, which focuses on the impact of others (principals, school leaders and facilitators) on teachers’ sensemaking of perceived risk. Chapter six addresses research question three on how others made sense of teachers’ emotional responses and actions in the professional learning.

Each of these three chapters begins with the research question, followed by recapping relevant information to position the findings that follow. Each finding is then presented as an overview followed by a detailed elaboration of that finding. Excerpts from interview transcripts are selected for their relevance to that finding, and are used to support and illustrate all findings. Diagrams and tables are also used throughout the finding chapters to support the text.

Research question one asked:

- What is the influence of perceptions of risk on teachers’ sensemaking of professional learning and their subsequent actions?

Positioning the findings for RQ1

This sub-section brings together relevant information from the previous chapters to position the findings. I begin by restating the purpose and hypothesis underpinning this research, then briefly revisit the conceptual framework (Fig. 4.1), and conclude by highlighting the data sources used, including how the data were collected and reported.

This case study aimed to understand teachers’ perceptions of risk and how these perceptions influenced their responses to professional learning for change. I was interested in understanding if teachers experienced concerns or uncertainty towards their PL and if so what responses and actions they took as a result. Ultimately, I was interested in why some teachers appeared not to engage with the PL and responded in seemingly emotional, negative or even resistant ways, thereby limiting their learning.

Learning for teachers, like learning for students, involves a complex interaction of cognition emotion and action. Teacher emotions are an important but not well-understood facet of
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teachers’ responses to change. My broad hypothesis was that teachers may form perceptions of risk and experience negative emotions due to the increased uncertainty created by changes in their context, and that these perceptions of risk and associated emotions could ultimately interfere with their learning and engagement.

This research was guided by a conceptual framework of perceptions of risk, informed by theories of risk perception (Aven & Renn, 2009; Reio, 2005; Zinn, 2009) and sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995, 2009). As stated earlier, I have conceptualised risk perceptions as an individual’s overall judgment (assessment and evaluation) of the possible risks (uncertainty around a future event and its consequences) and how these risks could affect them. The core premise is that uncertainty linked directly to perceptions of risk with uncertainty defined as not knowing, not being sure, or not having sufficient confidence about something in the future. The conceptual framework illustrated again in Figure 4.1, is discussed in greater detail at the end of Chapter 2.

Figure 4.1. Conceptual framework of perceptions of risk

Thus, an individual, in this case the teacher, would assess and evaluate uncertainty in the environment surrounding a future event, and or its consequences, along with the possible effect on them, to form an overall judgment or perception of risk. The teacher would then respond to his or her perceptions of risk, thereby impacting on learning.

The data used to address RQ1 were primarily from semi-structured interviews with 21 classroom teachers, seven from each of three schools, during their initial year of a school-based PL contract. These 21 teachers, all of whom provided informed consent, were interviewed near the introduction of the PL into their school to inquire into their initial sensemaking of their PL experience, possible formation of perceptions of risk, and impact on learning. Follow-up interviews checked and validated changes over time. Refer to Chapter 3 for greater detail on data collection.
The following elements are relevant for positioning the reported findings. The findings are reported as common themes across teachers’ perceptions of risk with frequency data. Frequency data reflected presence of the theme and was not indicative of intensity of the experience \textit{per se}. Teachers’ responses were not restricted to their current PL; therefore to avoid misrepresentation, they are not reported connected by school site. Additionally, the teachers spoke of professional learning in a holistic sense yet provided examples related to singular events or event types. Anomalies in the data are reported where evident.

\textbf{Similar Sources of Uncertainty}

Finding One: The majority of teachers experienced perceptions of risk, albeit at different intensities, connected to similar sources of uncertainty in their professional learning context. Only three of the twenty-one teachers, one from each of the three schools, reported experiencing no or negligible perceptions of risk or uncertainty in their professional learning.

The analysis and interpretation of teacher voice data from School 1 and School 2 collected during the first year of this research, uncovered evidence that the majority of teachers perceived similar sources of uncertainty, particularly connected to anticipated observations of their classroom practice and feedback sessions. Teachers used their assessment and evaluation of the uncertainty to form judgments about their perceptions of risk in the PL. This finding was confirmed by analysis of School 3 data collected in the second year.

\textbf{Assessment and evaluation of perceived risk}

There were strong themes of uncertainty contained in the majority of teachers’ assessment and evaluation of their changing school context. In the first instance, I analysed the uncertainty in relation to the introduction of the PL. There was evidence of three broad sequential categories:

1. existing uncertainty before the PL commenced,
2. uncertainty connected to future PL events such as the observations, and
3. uncertainty connected to the consequences of these future events.

These three categories provide greater detail and elucidation to the assessment and evaluation component of the conceptual framework of perceptions of risk as shown in Figure 4.2.
Teachers assessed and evaluated their professional learning environment to make sense of the new and unfamiliar changes that occurred with the introduction of new PL. Analysis of teachers’ interviews suggested that in the first instance existing uncertainty was used to frame the sense they made of uncertainty around a future PL event and its consequences.

**Existing uncertainty**

Uncertainty for teachers did not begin with the introduction of the PL in their schools. Teachers already held existing uncertainties from their prior experiences in teaching, professional learning, and life in general. Overall, teachers initially appeared to make sense of the new PL through their personal existing-uncertainty lens. For six teachers existing uncertainty did not appear to matter, however for the remaining 15 teachers existing uncertainty did matter and it affected how they framed or viewed the new PL and the events they were expected to engage in.

When a change initiative, such as this PL, enters a school environment the status quo is interrupted and those in the environment are forced to reconsider what is going on. Teachers brought their existing thoughts, feelings, and prior experiences to consider or make sense of this change. Common sources of existing uncertainty reported by teachers included teachers’ prior experiences of professional learning, expected ways of responding to change and uncertainty from existing in-school factors. Each of these is described below.

**Uncertainty from prior experience of professional learning**

Teachers recalled their prior PL in both positive and negative ways, however they were most likely to recall negative experiences. A little over half of all teachers (11/21) recalled experiences that made them reluctant to engage with the new PL. One common reason given for this negativity related to their perceived value of the past and current PL. They recalled
prior PL that had been ineffective, short-lived, and times when their school engaged in too much PL as justifications for their current uncertainty about the worth of the new PL. This teacher’s comments were indicative of others:

> Definitely. I was very reluctant. I was like ‘great, another one’. ‘What are we going to do this time’, kind of thing? Yeah, so I guess I was kind of negative coming into it. I wasn’t looking forward to it at all. (T8)

Teachers also linked their prior experiences of being observed in PL to the assessment and evaluation of their impending observations. Teachers recalled negative experiences almost spontaneously. The following teacher (T10) was surprised when she linked a negative memory of feeling uncertain from many years ago to her current PL experience: “I was very nervous and I remember videoing it and then I listened and watched it and thought oh my gosh. And it brought back those memories”.

For other teachers, being observed in previous PL did not need to be negative to bring thoughts of uncertainty to the current PL. The mere memory of teaching in front of others for one teacher surfaced thoughts of uncertainty. Teacher (T20) shared, “I think no matter how experienced I am or whatever, I just get a bit apprehensive when somebody walks into my class for an observation”. Observations for this teacher were always framed as uncomfortable.

**Expected ways of responding to the professional learning**

A further source of existing uncertainty related to a teacher’s expected response to new things. Most teachers appeared to believe that individuals, including themselves, responded in consistent and predictable ways when faced with uncertainty and change. A common way teachers expressed this was with statements predicated with “I always”, or they referred to personality factors as an explanation for their actions. These examples from Teachers T3, T8, and T20 respectively, are indicative of teachers’ beliefs around individual ways of responding: “I always have reservations”; “So I think I’ll always be like that”; and “because I think it’s who I am as well, it’s my personality, that I want to get it all right”. As well as believing that individuals respond in predictable ways to change, there was also consistent agreement that there were differences across individuals in the way they responded to new things. Teacher T1 explained:

> I think as a staff, we’re all so different, and there are some people who will hate everything and there were some - we’re all different. And there are some, ‘hey great
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“this is new, let’s have a look at it’. ‘Let’s unpack it, let’s see what it is and how it works’. We’re all different.

Teachers’ existing ways of responding to PL for change contributed to the on-going sense they made of the uncertainty they experienced in the current PL.

Uncertainty from existing in-school factors

Employment status, appraisal experiences and existing relationships were reported by some teachers (6/21) as sources of uncertainty they considered in making sense of the new PL. In all three schools, employment-related factors impacted on teacher’s uncertainty towards the PL. These teachers were uncertain how their participation in the new PL would affect their employment status especially if they were on short-term contracts, or wanted a good reference. Teacher T17 reported, “I do want a good reference from my principal. And that’s always at the back of my mind”.

Negative experiences of appraisal where leaders assess a teacher’s competency, and/or existing negative relationships also created uncertainty towards the new PL for some teachers, but this was not widespread. These experiences did not have to be recent. Teacher T3 reported how existing negative memories of appraisal combined with existing relationships created uncertainty towards current PL experiences:

When I was getting observed in the first years of my profession, it went negatively, and lately we do have one particular person who comes and observes me and this particular person never says anything nice about my lesson. That puts me off a little bit.

Interestingly many of these excerpts related to experiences where teachers had been observed.

Teachers’ existing uncertainties and ways of responding formed a lens through which the teachers made sense of the current PL. Existing uncertainty is conceived initially as uncertainty prior to the introduction of the current PL. However, as the teachers experienced the current PL, each new assessment and evaluation was made sense of by their updated existing uncertainty. That is, their existing uncertainty had been updated to include the sense made of their experiences in the current PL, reflecting the on-going cyclical nature of the sensemaking process. This highlights perceptions of risk as dynamic to each new experience, responsive to current and past contexts, and highly individual.
Uncertainty connected to a future event

The second broad category of uncertainty teachers spoke of concerned their uncertainty connected to a future event. This category is highlighted in Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3. Position of uncertainty connected to a future event relative to the PL.

Some future events such as anticipated observations, either in person or video-recorded, along with feedback sessions, featured more strongly than others in teachers retelling of uncertainty. Other events that teachers reported on included teacher presentations at whole staff PL meetings, one-one coaching, PL team meetings, and regular team meetings.

Teachers’ differences in perceptions of risk across these events are reported in Finding Four.

The majority of teachers (17/21) reported uncertainty from at least two of four broad sources of uncertainty associated with future PL events. These four broad sources of uncertainty related to: (a) the organisational details and purpose of the PL; (b) their relationships with others, such as facilitators and school leaders; (c) their state of knowledge and skills relative to their perception of what was expected as part of the PL; and (d) the sources of evidence that would or could be used by others to determine their progress in the PL.

These seventeen teachers spoke of their uncertainty in personal ways with varying levels of intensity from matter of fact statements to strong feeling-ridden assertions. Three teachers, across the three schools, reported negligible amounts of uncertainty that they either ignored or accepted as inevitable in their work.

The four sources of uncertainty associated with the future event were strongly interconnected in practice, influencing and being influenced by the other, however they are unpacked as separate sources of uncertainty to provide a deeper understanding.
Uncertainty connected to the organisation and purpose of the professional learning.

Three-quarters of teachers reported uncertainty (16/21) related to the organisation and purpose of the PL. They wanted to know why they were expected to engage in the PL, and whether it would work in their school with their students. The teachers also wanted explicit scheduling details in advance. This source of uncertainty was characterised by, “Do I know enough about this PL?” This source was more prevalent in the earlier stages of the PL when everything was new and lessened as the teachers became familiar with the PL, its protocols, processes and expectations. Teachers, who reported this source of uncertainty, expressed doubts about the success of the PL (13/21) and or reported having insufficient detail about the PL (8/21).

The teachers wanted greater clarity about the PL and details about future events, particularly information about expectations and organisation of events, such as classroom observations. This included having certainty over scheduling of their observations in a timely manner so they could be prepared. Changes or surprises in scheduling created unnecessary additional uncertainty. Teacher T19 described frustration attributed to uncertainty in not knowing enough about the organisation of the PL, “I don’t even know when that is. I didn’t even know – is there going to be another one? That what I’m saying, I don’t even know there’s going to be another one”. This teacher preferred to be organised and expected to know details well ahead of time.

The thirteen teachers who expressed doubt at the start over the success of this PL were aware of the extra time and effort required based on their experiences in previous PL. They wanted to be sure it would be worth their time and effort and appeared to calculate this in a cost-benefit assessment. Uncertainty about the PL made it difficult for Teacher T5 to evaluate the benefits:

The problem for me and the way my brain thinks is, I need to know what the outcomes are going to be at the end. What’s it going to look like? And how are we going to achieve it? And then, what’s the benefit?

Overall, these teachers wanted greater detail and certainty around the organisation and purpose of the PL itself.
Uncertainty connected to relationships with others

The most common potential source of uncertainty that teachers (18/21) spoke about when interviewed related to the quality of relationships, especially teacher-facilitator and teacher-PL leader. As part of the PL, teachers were expected to work closely with and share their practice with facilitators whom they did not know, and school leaders whom they may have known, but in different contexts such as colleagues. These school leaders directly involved in the PL are referred to as PL leaders.

Fifteen teachers referred directly to relationships within the PL, such as teacher-PL leader, as a source of uncertainty. An additional three teachers inferred the importance of positive relationships in enabling change by including positive comments about their current working relationships in the PL. Only three teachers did not refer to relationships as a source of uncertainty. Relationship-related uncertainty reduced over time as the new relationships developed and became established.

Essentially uncertainty for teachers connected with relationships in PL was characterised by “Do I know this person well enough to share my changing practice?” If the answer was no or contained degrees of uncertainty, then teachers were less willing to take risks in what they shared. Having one’s developing practice exposed for others to watch, unavoidably increased uncertainty thereby increasing the overall perceived risk for teachers. Teachers needed certainty in their relationships to take risks as the following excerpt from one teacher illustrated:

"If you don’t have the relationship with the people – we are like the kids. If you don’t have that relationship, you’re not prepared to take the risk. . . . I’m one of those people, if I’m supported; I’m more likely to take that risk. (T19)"

Relationship-related uncertainty, especially in the early stages, led some teachers to find it difficult to try new things in the presence of others, especially facilitators, who as Teacher T9 described “didn’t really know them from a bar of soap”. This not knowing impacted on teachers’ responses and led them to take fewer risks and choose safer options. For example, one teacher planned special lessons until the teacher knew and trusted the facilitator.

Over time, teachers’ relationships with facilitators and PL leaders developed a type of bond or sense of connectedness. Teachers reported feeling less uncertainty, greater comfort, and confidence once this bond had formed. They took greater risks in what they shared,
including being prepared to share weaknesses along with an increased willingness to ask for help. Teachers T20 and T9 explained:

*I think that building relationships is very important. When the facilitator[s] came and we didn’t know them, and as we got to know them, it was a better relationship and we could talk to them and question them. Yeah, so we were actually much more comfortable.*

*Yeah, I came clean because, I suppose we were bonded more. I didn’t know if [the facilitator] was really trying to help me or not.*

Building quality relationships was about more than time as not all relationships reached this level of comfort for teachers. This next teacher, Teacher T8 illustrated how a bond made a difference when working with a new PL leader, “That was pretty huge for me cos it just made me feel so much more comfortable with those observations... with them”.

An important contributor to building relationships related to the presence or absence of trust in their relationships. Thirteen teachers reported lack of trust and or concerns about confidentiality as a source of relationship-related uncertainty. Teachers needed to know with certainty how the facilitators and PL leaders would respond after an event. It was essential for teachers that the facilitator and PL leaders demonstrated and maintained confidentiality about the teacher’s observed practice. Confidentiality was related to trust, especially if the outcome was “less than perfect”. Teacher T20, then Teacher T9 shared their views on why confidentiality mattered:

*Yes, and it’s about confidentiality as well. It’s about how is that leader going to be confidential. . . . ‘Oh I went to this person and it was a horrible lesson. [They] couldn’t manage [their] class,’ - that kind of thing. So it all ties up*

*I think it feels riskier at the start when you don’t really know someone. But then when you get – it’s been a year now with the [facilitator], so we know [them], we know [they] wouldn’t go tell the principal, ‘Oh my goodness, I just saw an awful lesson with that teacher. They’re a shocking teacher. You should fire them.*

For a few teachers, uncertainty connected with existing or new relationships remained, especially if their experiences in the PL felt negative or unsuccessful. These teachers continued to experience perceptions of risk as a result of uncertainty connected to their relationships. In the two extracts below, uncertainty was still evident for both teachers at the
end of the year. Teacher T3’s existing uncertainty remained whereas Teacher T19 still perceived the relationship with the facilitator had not yet reached a level where greater risk-taking could occur:

I think that’s why it really depends on the person who is observing you. With this particular person, I do dread it. I am completely relaxed with another.

I don’t really feel - honestly I haven’t had a relationship with them and I’ve said that before, so maybe I’m holding back. But I am very open as a person so I don’t feel I’m holding back anything.

In sum, the quality of relationships inversely related to perceptions of risk as illustrated in Figure 4.4.

![Figure 4.4](image)

Figure 4.4. Relationship between perceptions of risk and quality of relationships.

Teachers in this research were more likely to try new and uncertain practices when their relationships with others were secure, trusting, and confidential.

Uncertainty connected to state of knowledge and skills.

Two thirds of the teachers (14/21) across all three schools talked about their state of knowledge and skills as a source of uncertainty towards their upcoming events even though the events were designed to promote professional learning. These teachers were uncertain and lacked confidence relative to their perception of what was expected. In this core source of uncertainty, teachers questioned, “Do I have the knowledge and skills to do what is expected of me?” State of knowledge is used here to refer to the teacher’s current level of knowledge and knowing how. This related to teachers’ confidence and clarity in knowing and using the new skills, as well as any confusions and or not knowing.

Teachers assessed and evaluated their knowledge in personal ways, again emphasising the individual nature of teacher’s sensemaking of their PL experiences. Perceptions of risk were apparent for those teachers who experienced strong feelings of uncertainty over their
knowledge. These teachers’ narratives contrasted with others who either did not perceive this uncertainty or appeared to accept their current level of uncertainty in knowing what and how.

All teachers who described uncertainty in their knowledge explicitly connected this to not having clarity around what they were expected to know and do. Teachers wanted to know exactly what they needed to know and be able to do to be successful. This was about being clear about knowledge and knowing the criteria for success. Without this clarity or explicitness they reported uncertainty and unwillingness to take risks. Teacher T5 followed by Teacher T19, from different schools, explained this link between their need for clear success criteria to reduce their perceptions of risk:

If you can have a clear picture or if I have a clear understanding of exactly what it’s going to entail, then it would probably alleviate any fears about what’s coming. It’s that unknown of, we’re not really sure on what we’re meant to be achieving or what it’s meant to look like, is my worry right now.

Probably clarity. Definitely clarity. I think if I knew exactly what they were looking for, I’d be a lot more willing to take the risks because then I know what they’re looking for . . . I’m quite open about learning, but it has to be clear, and that’s my only issue . . . but I haven’t been detailed enough about how I can get to the point they want us to be at.

Teachers made sense of their need for clarity in personal ways. For some teachers, gaining clarity involved seeing with their own eyes or having a visual image in their head through modelling or watching a video, while for another it included experiencing a “light bulb” moment. For them all, it was about feeling certain about what they were expected to do. Gaining clarity for teachers was personal:

You’re given all these readings and stuff, you don’t actually have a visual image of what it looks like and you’re hoping that what you’re doing is correct, but you’re only going to find out in the observation as to whether you’ve done it or not. (T11)

Modelling is good to see it in the right kind of context, and seeing exactly what the expectations are – so like an example basically. (T16)

I think when it changed . . . . When I got really into it, actually, was when [the facilitator] did the balloon animals for the success criteria and I had a light bulb
Issues of lack of clarity in knowledge ranged from simply not knowing or not knowing with sufficient detail to not understanding clearly and states of confusion. Teachers commonly reported the difference between having the theory or tool and not knowing what this looked like in practice. Teacher T6 reflected, “when the facilitator handed out the hand-outs, oh this is what a - these pretty charts and things. But I still looked at it like how does it work, what does it actually look like?” Lack of clarity affected teachers’ perceptions of their ability to know what to do with certainty and confidence.

This combined lack of certainty and confidence affected teachers’ actions and ultimately impacted on their learning. For some this reduced their willingness to take risks and try new things. Teacher T6 described the connection between willingness, confidence, and uncertainty:

And so I was not wanting to try things more because I was not confident in it. So I wasn’t wanting to take risks in my teaching or in my professional development because I had lost my confidence in what I was doing, through uncertainty.

For others this uncertainty and lack of confidence created additional uncertainty for the anticipated event and reduced their capacity to self-monitor progress. This made the teacher as learner, dependent on others. One teacher reported the effect of not knowing on their learning:

Before I’ve gone in, I’ve been – well I don’t know whether I have or I haven’t, I’m just going to take a swing and hope that I hit something. . . . There are times where I’ve left my observation and I’ve thought that I’ve done really terrible, but I’ve found that I’ve done really well, but I have no idea because sometimes the outcomes aren’t really clearly stated. (T11)

A number of teachers (8/21) reported confusing things or feeling confused at some time in the PL. This state of not understanding something clearly was uncomfortable for these teachers particularly if they remained confused for some time. Teachers made sense of their confusion retrospectively by explaining their confusions as missing vital details of the required knowledge and or from receiving mixed messages. Teacher (T16) explained feeling confused along with the “snowballing” consequences on their confidence:
I was unsure as to what my next steps were. I didn’t feel as though they were explained to me as clearly as they could have been . . . . I really need things really kind of clear. And so I felt like I missed that part in this, and then it snowballed . . . . feeling confused and unsure. And also losing my confidence.

This particular PL on formative assessment was demanding on teachers, as it required most teachers to change or adapt their everyday practices and consider their role as a teacher. Doing something new, by definition required the teachers to experience unknowns and uncertainty as they attempted to make changes in their teaching. Teachers used expressions like “leap of faith” to describe the gap between what they confidently knew and the new less familiar practices. Teacher T14 described what it felt like to take that risk:

\[
\text{I think it’s just a lot of us like to sit and just stick to that norm of the things, the habit - the things that we know and sometimes it is hard to step out. It probably was at the beginning but I think once I stepped out I found that it was working for me.}
\]

However, others used descriptions that could be interpreted as reflecting greater perceptions of risk. Three teachers used metaphors of darkness to describe their lack of confidence and clarity in the PL. Their examples included taking a “stab in the dark”, “doing things in the dark”, and a “light at the end of the tunnel”.

Teachers were aware of the expectations on them from principals, school leaders and facilitators. All interviewed teachers reported their willingness to participate in the PL and more importantly they reported having high expectations of themselves. Implicit in their expectations of self was the need to be successful as a teacher. In the following excerpts, Teachers T14, T18, and T3, one from each school respectively, shared their expectations:

\[
\text{And I think there’s just always that risk of failure and no one wants to fail, everybody wants to do well don’t they?}
\]

\[
\text{Nobody ever wants to look like they don’t know what they’re doing. And if you’re not 100% sure about what you’re doing, to do something that, you can feel very intimidated or at risk, your word, because are you doing the right thing? Are you saying the right thing?}
\]

\[
\text{Your expectation as a professional, as a teacher so experienced, is that you should know it, and I know that we’re always learning and we do make mistakes.}
\]
Not all teachers in this study reported uncertainty around their state of knowledge as perceptions of risk. The following teacher appeared to accept uncertainty or not knowing as part of learning:

*I have had to change my practice. I’m looking more into my success criteria now, so when I develop my lessons or plan my lessons I’m looking at it more carefully and ensuring that I’m not confusing it with activities, which was something that I sometimes did previously. So I’m just a little more wary of that.* (T20)

In summary, teachers assessed and evaluated their level of knowledge and knowing how as a source of uncertainty towards their upcoming event. When teachers were uncertain or confused, and lacked confidence in the state of their knowledge, their perceptions of risk increased. Conversely as teachers’ states of knowledge improved through increased clarity and removal of confusion, their confidence and perceptions of risk reduced. This inverse relationship is illustrated below in Figure 4.5.

![Figure 4.5. Relationship between perceptions of risk and state of knowledge.](image)

**Uncertainty connected to sources of evidence**

Leaders in each school collected a range of evidence to evaluate teachers’ practices as part of ongoing teacher appraisal processes. Evidence specific to the PL, such as lesson observation data were also collected. Two thirds of the teachers interviewed (14/21) mentioned practices around the use of evidence as a source of uncertainty. This source of uncertainty surrounding future events related to the type of the evidence PL leaders and facilitators would collect, along with how this evidence would be used, especially if its use might go beyond the PL context. They wanted to know “What might be used to judge me and my practice?” This source of uncertainty centred not only on what was collected per se, but was strongly linked to the possible judgments others may make using the different types of evidence.
While there was certainty for the teachers that the anticipated observation and feedback sessions or staff presentation would be the main site of evidence collection on their performance, teachers were not certain that other non-designated events such as unplanned walk throughs, might also be opportunities for evidence gathering. Teachers were not comfortable or had perceptions of risk being seen by others while trying something new. Teachers T9 and T17 explained respectively:

So I’m learning something new. I felt like I needed some time to master it first before they came in and had a look.

I feel very confident with my kids and I feel confident to experiment with the kids. It's nothing to do with that - it's just about if somebody's monitoring me, yeah, then I'd have to know it's for the right reasons... I'll start to be concerned that they'll take that as being representative of my teaching practice, the new thing... Am I going to get marked down because it's new to me?

Teachers also spoke of their uncertainty about how the collected evidence could be used by others both within and beyond the PL context. Although quite similar to uncertainty surrounding trust and confidentiality of school leaders and facilitators as discussed earlier under relationships, teachers wanted guarantees that the evidence collected would only be used for their learning in the PL and not other purposes such as appraisal and employment-related processes. These teachers needed to feel safe in taking risks in their learning without the fear of wider ramifications. Teacher T15 then Teacher T5 expressed their uncertainty:

I think that’s the big word for me, confidentiality and that what I am going to attempt to do is not going to be misused against me. The risk taking wasn’t so much from the wanting to do, it was where the information was going and what would be fed back.

It’s that unknown. Are you looking at the kids? Are you looking at me? What is it? Yeah, so a question of that... and you’ll never hear anything about it, so you don’t know.

An example of uncertainty connected to evidence related to collecting student voice data where facilitators or leaders asked students to talk about their learning. The use of student voice as evidence of the efficacy of their teaching practice was relatively new and contained uncertainty around its collection and use. Additionally, it was a practice that teachers felt they held little control over. In the following extracts both teachers explained their
uncertainty connected to the selection of students. Implicit in both was uncertainty over what the students might say:

Yeah, well I don’t feel like they come in to see me teach; they come in to talk to the kids what they’re learning about, but they talk to the ones that aren’t with the teacher, . . . But it depends on when they come in. . . (T9)

Not that one, take that one who was paying attention. Yes, that’s the nerve-wracking part of it, is when she takes the kids . . . . They ask the children that, so you really have no control over what they say. (T4)

Evidence-related uncertainty around asking students their views reduced quickly as teachers became more familiar with student voice practices; gained partial control over the selection of students, usually as a result of facilitators asking them to nominate students; and students’ responses indicating positive shifts connected to the use of the new teacher practices.

**Uncertainty connected to consequences of a future event**

Uncertainty for teachers also stemmed from being unsure about the consequences of a PL event, adding to yet distinct from, uncertainty about that event. This third and final broad category used to conceptualise teachers’ uncertainty is highlighted in Figure 4.6.

![Figure 4.6](image)

Figure 4.6. Position of uncertainty connected to consequences of a future event relative to the PL.

Teachers perceived uncertainty around consequences of a future event as potentially impacting on outcomes for themselves in the first instance as well as outcomes for others, predominantly their students.
TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RISK IN PL

Outcomes for self

Almost all the teachers in this study (17/21), expressed concerns at the possible consequences of the event on themselves. At a practical level, teachers were interested in how the PL would affect their daily life in terms of effort, time, and an anticipated yet unknown increase in their workload. They wanted to be sure that it would be worthwhile in terms of student learning. Teacher T8 stated this clearly:

I was worried that I’d spend all that time and it wouldn’t really pay off. Time and brain power and stress and everything that comes in with it. . . . How do I know it’s going to be worthwhile for the kids? All this effort I’m doing, but is it going to make a difference? And you don’t know that, especially at the beginning.

Teachers with negative past experiences of professional learning viewed the new PL through an existing uncertainty lens that made them more wary of committing to the extra workload. However, it was at a personal level that teachers’ perceived uncertainty for themselves connected to possible consequences of the PL or its event. They wanted to know “Will I get it right, and what might this mean for me, or how might others evaluate my performance?” Overwhelmingly, teachers wanted to do well and for this to be known by others.

Approximately half of the teachers (11/21) explicitly framed their PL in terms of their own possible success or failure and wanting to get it right. In the following extracts, the first teacher (T3) appeared more affected by the thought of getting it wrong than the second teacher (T12) who used a coping strategy to deal with the uncertainty:

There is a lot of things where I fear whether I’m doing it right, and I think that’s a really big thing, actually, I believe, for a lot of staff. Am I doing it right? There’s a lot of uncertainty.

I never really know whether I am doing some things right or wrong so I come ready for some feedback that is positive or negative.

Nearly all teachers reported the need to take risks to learn yet this was not always applied to their own learning. Some teachers struggled with the difference between making mistakes as part of learning, something they reportedly stressed with their students, yet framed their own mistakes as “getting it wrong”. This next teacher reflected on making mistakes:
Teachers framed success differently across events thus perceiving uncertainty of outcomes in different ways. They were more lenient on themselves at the start of the PL, framing the first event as baseline data, which mitigated against negative consequences. On the other hand, if teachers perceived themselves as unsuccessful beyond the first event, subsequent uncertainty and perceptions of risk gained momentum. The sense the teachers made of an event framed as failure cycled back to increase subsequent perceptions of risk for future events. The contrasting sensemaking of a first event with that of an event post failure are described by Teachers T12 and T19 respectively:

Yeah so I was a bit nervous about that, yeah, but knowing it was my first time I felt like if I flunk it, it wasn't that bad because it was my first time. So I just tried it and it seemed to work out.

If I don’t get it right the first time, I’m more vulnerable to failure unless I’m guided in the right direction.

Furthermore, teachers responded emotionally to perceptions of risk around possible consequences for themselves, especially in light of on-going perceived failure. For some teachers this affected how they viewed themselves. This is unpacked further in Finding Two on vulnerability.

Outcomes for others

Teachers were uncertain and concerned about the outcomes for others in the PL, predominantly about outcomes for their students. All but three teachers (18/21) in this study explicitly reported uncertainty for their students as a result of the PL. Teachers understood that PL would impact on their students and they wanted that impact to be positive and worthwhile. Teacher T10 described uncertainty connected to the impact of the PL on students using a metaphor of a Māori outrigger-canoe:

I would then have to liken it to outrigging, to waka ama, . . . so it would be like riding a ten-foot wave and coming down on the other side. It’s very easy to get up that wave, but it's the impact, the after-effects of where that wave’s going to go and what it will do and who it will impact on. So it’s the wave crashing on the sand. And if you think
of the children as the sand, what impact is that going to have? Will it leave a mark? How big a dent would that be, kind of thing?

In addition to being concerned and uncertain about gaining positive outcomes from the PL for students, the teachers were concerned how their own success impacted on their students. The following teachers described their uncertainty and genuine concern for their students with respect to the PL:

Because I’m very invested in my classroom and my children’s learning, and I really work hard with their parents and all their families to do the best that I can, and at that time, it just wasn’t going well. And I felt like I wasn’t doing that for them. (T16)

For the kids as well. It’s a risk for me to try something new if I know that this works and my kids are doing well with what I’m already doing, and then trying something else and I don’t know if my kids are going to do well, cos they don’t have time for me to experiment with stuff I don’t know. They need what works like now. (T8)

Teachers who perceived risks in the PL were motivated to take those risks to change their practices if they thought it would benefit their students. Teachers T19 and T16 respectively, reflected on being motivated to take risks for the benefit of their students:

I’m more likely to accept I need to change my teaching style if this is going to benefit my kids.

And if I didn’t do it, then I wouldn’t be doing anything good for my kids, because then my kids would go onto the next classroom not understanding.

Certainty that the expected changes would benefit their students was not possible at the start and it was not surprising that nearly all teachers questioned the likelihood of positive student outcomes.

Summary of Finding One

Teachers formed perceptions of risk connected to different sources of uncertainty. These sources of uncertainty fell broadly into three categories: existing uncertainties prior to the PL; uncertainty connected to the future event such as observations; and uncertainty connected to the consequences of that future event. The sources of uncertainty although unpacked separately, formed a complex web of connections, exerting reciprocal influences in a
TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RISK IN PL

seemingly cumulative manner to raise levels into a central *bucket-like vessel* of perceived uncertainty. This was especially noticeable at the start of the PL where most things were new and uncertain for the teachers. For some teachers this cumulative bucket filled faster than for other teachers whose level remained low or imperceptible. Teachers brought their bucket of uncertainty into the future event as perceptions of risk. This next teacher (T9) described the cumulative effect of multiple sources of uncertainty: “If you’ve got a new facilitator and a new thing you’re working on, two new things at once, and then instant ‘how are you doing?’” Some sources of uncertainty appeared to exert more influence than others in the formation of perceptions of risk for teachers. Uncertainty around relationships, knowledge, and outcomes for self and students, appeared central to teachers’ perceptions of risk. When teachers were uncertain and lacked confidence in their relationships, knowledge, and their potential to succeed for their students, they spoke of associated feelings of “not feeling good about myself”, or feeling “uncomfortable”, “threatened”, and “overwhelmed”. I have referred to this primarily emotional component of teachers’ risk perceptions as vulnerability.

Teachers’ perceptions of risk varied in nature and intensity across individuals. Each teacher made their own sense of the different sources of uncertainty they perceived in their PL context, initially framed through their existing uncertainty. Some teachers experienced intense perceptions of risk while others reported no perceptions of risk at all. Moreover, teacher’s perceptions of risk changed, often quickly, in response to their ongoing experiences. Teachers’ perceptions of risk were unique, dynamic and responsive to their experiences. They were also intertwined with teachers’ feelings of vulnerability, discussed next in Finding Two.

**Perceptions of Risk and Feelings of Vulnerability**

Finding Two: Teachers who perceived risk in the professional learning experienced variable levels of emotional response, usually as feelings of vulnerability. Their feelings of vulnerability were the result of how they might feel should the perceived risk(s) affect them. Teachers attributed feelings of vulnerability to various sources of uncertainty. Only the three teachers (3/21), who did not report perceptions of risk or uncertainty, did not report some feelings of vulnerability.

Although anticipating emotion and cognition to factor in teachers’ risk perceptions I had not foreseen how prevalent the concept of vulnerability would be in teachers’ narratives about
how their perceived risks may affect them. Most teachers (12/14) from Year One of this research considered the possibility of feeling embarrassed, losing confidence or a more intense feeling of risking their identity as a teacher. None of the teachers used the word *vulnerability* explicitly but the concept was present. Teacher T9 articulated the meaning of vulnerability without using the word, “But I think that’s the biggest – the thing, the risk that a teacher would feel, is that they look bad in front of someone. That’s the riskiest thing of all”.

As a result of this finding, I deliberately explored feelings of vulnerability connected to uncertainty with the teachers in the third school the following year. The majority of these teachers (6/7) reported some level of feelings of vulnerability connected to perceptions of risk in the PL, confirming the findings from the first year. Teacher T13 used imagery of having holes or flaws to explain uncertainty and vulnerability: “Well if you’re uncertain, you’ve got holes in your makeup. So you’re leaking”. When asked about vulnerability this teacher replied, “You can see tears coming through holes . . . . You open yourself up to people’s opinion”.

Additionally, I revisited my conceptual framework and revised it to explicitly include feelings of vulnerability. This change, shown in Figure 4.7 is explained next.

![Figure 4.7. Revised conceptual framework of perceptions of risk showing feelings of vulnerability.](image)

**Changes to the conceptual framework**

In this revised framework (Fig. 4.7), feelings of vulnerability are conceptualised to link directly with teachers’ assessments and evaluations of uncertainty in the PL environment. Feelings of vulnerability are primarily considered in this research to be an emotional component of perceptions of risk towards a future event and or the consequences of that
event. They go beyond the concern for getting it right as discussed in uncertainty connected to outcomes for self and are primarily an inward looking reflection on how the individual feels about the possible risks happening, especially if the future event included exposure of practice.

Thus vulnerability is conceptualised in this research as feelings (expressed as emotions) and thoughts (cognition) that occur when uncertainty towards an anticipated event or its consequences challenges one’s identity or emotional security. These feelings are dynamic and change in intensity depending on the perceived level of risk. As risk perceptions increase so too will feelings of vulnerability. Alternatively, when perceptions of risk towards the future event are negligible, feelings of vulnerability would be low and confidence high.

Together, perceptions of risk and vulnerability not only influence each other, but also influence how individuals respond as a result of forming risk perceptions. In this way, an individual’s responses ultimately impact on their learning. Teachers’ feelings of vulnerability are unpacked next by reporting the themes found in teachers’ descriptions and explanations of these feelings.

**Teachers’ feelings of vulnerability**

The majority of teachers reported feelings of vulnerability connected to perceptions of risk either in the current PL or prior PL experiences. Only those teachers who did not report risk reported no feelings of vulnerability suggesting a strong connection between perceptions of risk and the presence of vulnerability. Feelings of vulnerability represented an individual’s evaluation of how the perceived risk could affect them if they should happen and how they would feel about themselves. They were the response to. “How might I feel if X happens?” In this case X is perceived negatively and represents multiple possible options.

Teachers described their feelings of vulnerability in different ways but essentially their descriptions of vulnerability were inward looking and related to how they perceived themselves, as a person and a teacher as a result of having their personal and professional identities challenged. Teacher T10 expressed vulnerability:

*I think that might come down to quite possibly, my own interpretation of myself as a professional. Do I fit the mould? Am I doing the job? Do I deserve to be here? It could be considered self-doubt,
Teachers’ perceptions of risk in PL

Teachers’ personal and professional identities, separately and together, were challenged when teachers found themselves in situations where they perceived risks in failing, when others contested their credibility and reputation as successful teachers, or where they perceived they had already failed. These feelings of vulnerability were especially prevalent when their practice was exposed to others. Teachers worried about being seen as a bad teacher, ineffective, and less able than their peers. They also reported feelings of loss of credibility and reputation. In the extracts below, the teachers T14 and T8 respectively looked inwards as they pondered the possible effect of failure on them:

*I think it's more that risk of my own failure more than anything, yeah. I don’t see anything, any other way but maybe you think, oh I don’t want management to think I’m hopeless or whatever.*

*It is embarrassment and I also don’t want to be seen as not knowing what I’m doing.*

Emotion and cognition were inextricably linked in teachers’ descriptions of vulnerability. As vulnerability increased, teacher emotions typically became more visible and dominant, whereas conversely when teachers reported low or negligible vulnerability, teachers appeared to frame their experiences more cognitively. Teachers referred to their feelings of vulnerability as challenging their efficacy and identity as a teacher. Teacher T16, for example, made sense of these feelings by reframing his/her identity as a learner:

*It’s really uncool as a teacher to feel uncertain in what you’re doing . . . I felt like I wasn’t doing my job properly. I wasn’t fully effective, and that was difficult. . . . I think I was embarrassed. I know it sounds silly, but I was embarrassed that I didn’t understand it, and I couldn’t do it effectively - when I’m a teacher and I’m a fully qualified teacher. It’s not like I’m a beginning teacher . . . And when I finally did get it, I thought oh, I’m one of those learners - those ones that take a very long time.*

Teachers who experienced higher levels of vulnerability reported strong negative emotions using terms of feeling “crushed”, “sad”, or “overwhelmed”.

Teachers made sense of their feelings of vulnerability by attributing their feelings to the various sources of uncertainty. They did this to make sense of previous experiences as well as to frame future ones. They attributed vulnerability to uncertainty around single or multiple sources such as their state of knowledge, current relationships and organisation of the PL.
Teachers most often attributed vulnerability to their state of knowledge, especially when they realised they were confused or did not understand what they needed to know and do sufficiently well to be seen as successful. They expressed feeling “set up to fail”, “second-guessing”, and “self-doubt”. Teacher T16 followed by Teacher T3 expressed their self-doubt:

*I’m not actually getting what I need out of it before I go in for my next observation. So it’s setting myself up to fail. That’s what it felt like. . . . Actually lately I’ve been a lot more critical in myself. I’ve been also, unfortunately, second-guessing what I’m doing, instead of just knowing what I’m doing, which is what I normally do.*

*I don’t feel vulnerable, I don’t. I feel overwhelmed. There’s too much to do, very little time, and like I said, there’s always that thing at the back of your head saying, am I doing it right?*

Teachers’ feelings of vulnerability responded to their ongoing sensemaking of their experiences, especially exposure of their practice and negative experiences. Implicit in exposure or being seen by others, is the potential for judgment to occur, whether intended by the observer or not. Teachers were uncertain how observers might respond. The following teachers T14 and T19 respectively, explained their strong connections between risk, judgment and exposure:

*It’s people coming to watch you and you do a really poor job, and then you feel really bad about yourself and people talk in the school, oh [they’re] not a very good teacher or whatever. So those kind of things and just not feeling good about yourself.*

*If I had a good lesson, I’m happy to show with everyone. With this [PL] I’m more vulnerable because I don’t know if I’ve done it right. . . . But when I know that I haven’t done it right, I don’t want to share it, because it’s a failure.*

Negative experiences such as an observation framed as failure, led to increased perceptions of risk for subsequent events and intensified the teacher’s feelings of vulnerability. Teacher T4 described this negative effect that appeared much worse because it was unexpected:

*The risk for me was standing up and doing something that I thought I was doing right. Like I believed in my heart that I was doing something right, and then being told it was wrong. That was the biggest risk because then I risked myself feeling really down. And it’s not good for anyone.*
In contrast, positive experiences such as feelings of success after an event reduced teachers’ vulnerability by lowering perceptions of risk. Teacher T16 described going “away feeling comfortable and it took away that element of fear when you were going into the observation”. Similarly, a generalised lowering of uncertainty through familiarity reduced feelings of vulnerability for Teacher T3:

*The beginning of the year we were very uncertain about many things, and so I felt very vulnerable. Now I know what the PD is about, I’m comfortable with the observers, they explain themselves a whole lot better. It’s become less vulnerable and I’m more confident really.*

Feelings of vulnerability ultimately impacted negatively on learning. Teacher T14 and Teacher T4 both highlighted the possibility of a negative spiral occurring as vulnerability impacted on themselves and their students:

*So that's probably the biggest risk is just your own self-confidence and feeling good about your own teaching, and if you don't feel good about your own teaching you're probably not going to do a good job either.*

*I don’t like to fail. Yeah in myself, I thought that I was failing - not only myself, but my children.*

Additionally, teachers from two out of the three schools spoke of vulnerability connected to their current or future employment conditions, particularly when they did not hold permanent positions. They referred directly to the decisional power of others over their future and relayed feelings of pressure to perform. This next teacher referred to this employment-related vulnerability. The teacher (T17) recognised that the contestable nature of others’ judgments added to feelings of uncertainty and vulnerability:

*Now I realise it is job security. Like that is behind all my risk – everything. Because, I know I'm a good teacher with the kids, I have good relationships, but there's always that chance somebody else may not think that and therefore word would get out that I'm not and therefore, you spiral down into the, ‘and how would I pay my mortgage’, kind of thinking.*

In contrast to the majority of the teachers interviewed, the one teacher in each school who did not report particular risk perceptions in this PL did not refer to vulnerability. It was as if the professional learning did not impact on their identity as a teacher. Teacher T2 explained, “It’s
a confidence thing. Like it’s not confident in that I think I’m the bee’s knee and I’m the world’s best teacher, it’s confidence as in, I’m not worried if it goes wrong”. A connection to identity existed but did not appear to be challenged by making mistakes in the PL. They also did not report feelings of exposure.

Finally, teachers talked about their feelings of vulnerability in ways that framed vulnerability as a weakness and something that interrupted their learning. Only one teacher in the study questioned the framing of risk and vulnerability negatively. During the initial interview, Teacher T10 questioned this negative view:

Why does vulnerability have to be a weakness? Why can’t it be a strength? Somebody who allows themselves – and yeah, you don’t want to get beat up about this, but somebody who allows themselves to take those risks knowing that they could fail and have a go, and why not. We ask this of our kids everyday. It’s about taking those risks.

**Summary of Finding Two**

The majority of the teachers (18/21) reported some level of vulnerability connected to perceptions of risk in the PL, mostly towards possible failure seen by others. Feelings of vulnerability challenged how teachers viewed themselves as a person and as a teacher. When these feelings were intense, they were linked to feelings of embarrassment and hopelessness. Teachers made sense of their feelings of vulnerability by attributing their feelings to the various sources of uncertainty, most commonly uncertainty in their state of knowledge that is, their ability to know what and how to do the required practices in the PL.

Teachers’ feelings of vulnerability were individual and responsive to each new event and also influenced the next. On the one hand, perceptions of success after an event subsequently reduced teachers’ feelings of vulnerability. On the other hand, for a small number of teachers who experienced uncomfortable journeys, most likely framed by them as failure, their feelings of vulnerability escalated. As a result, their personal and professional identities were challenged and their learning interrupted.

Feelings of vulnerability and their associated negative emotions reduced teachers’ capacity to learn. Ultimately, only successful learning experiences tipped the balance in the other direction. The impact of perceptions of risk and vulnerability on learning are discussed next in Finding Three.
Impact of Response on Learning

Finding Three: Teachers responded to their perceptions of risk to reduce their uncertainty and vulnerability in a variety of ways. The actions they took were determined to a greater extent by the relative balance of emotion and cognition, thereby impacting on their learning both positively and negatively.

This finding corresponds to the middle section of the conceptual framework (Figure 4.8) and links perceived risk and feelings of vulnerability (left box) to the upcoming PL event (right box).

Figure 4.8. Revised conceptual framework highlighting response to risk perception.

I begin with a short section reporting on teachers’ emotional responses to their perceptions of risk and feelings of vulnerability. I then describe the common actions they took followed by reporting the impact of these actions on their learning. The data source for this finding predominantly relates to the 14 teachers from Schools 1 and 3 who talked about their actions and emotional responses in relation to ongoing observation of their practice, either in class or by video recording. Examples from teacher interviews are selected for their relevance to the theme not by representativeness to all teachers.

Emotional responses to perceptions of risk

Emotion was present in the PL environment especially associated with feelings of vulnerability as discussed above in Finding Two. The majority of the teachers (12/14) from Schools 1 and 3 reported varying types and intensities of emotion as they prepared for, delivered or responded to their observation and feedback sessions. Teachers from School 2, reported low perceptions of risk and levels of emotion related to presenting to staff.

An analysis of teachers’ reports of their emotional responses indicated a mixed relationship between level of perceived risk and emotional response. On the one hand, emotional
responses were more likely to be reported and at a stronger intensity by those teachers who perceived greater risks in their PL event. On the other hand, some teachers worked hard to keep their emotions private. They downplayed their emotions or reported sharing them only with trusted others within or outside the school. Visibility of emotion was not always a good indication of an individual teacher’s felt emotion.

Teachers’ emotions were dynamic, occurring quickly in response to embarrassment, perceived failure, and confusion. For example, even while retelling, this teacher’s strong emotion remained evident, “Why I ever did that, [Bangs the desk] and why did I do that, [Bangs the desk] and you get more anxious, because you felt that it was not as successful as it could have been” [intentionally not identified]. Strong emotional responses appeared easy to recall, did not dissipate quickly, nor were they forgotten.

Most teachers reported some degree of nervousness or discomfort when their practice was under scrutiny or exposed. However, three of the fourteen teachers from Schools 1 and 3 reported feeling anxious. These three teachers attributed their anxiety predominantly to perceptions of risk connected to their state of knowledge. They reported feeling embarrassed that they were confused about the PL and were unable to do what was required. Emotion influenced their total PL experience, affecting their preparation for the event, their decisions and cognition during the event and how they framed the outcome of the event. Perceptions of risk as uncertainty and vulnerability played a central role in intensifying their negative emotions ultimately affecting their capacity for learning.

**Teacher actions**

Teachers reported taking multiple actions in response to the level of perceived risk they had formed through their ongoing assessment and evaluation of the uncertainty connected to that event. The teachers’ actions were typically focused on reducing the perceived risks in the event and its consequence, which for the most part also improved the likelihood of success in the event. These risk minimising actions increased their certainty and confidence and thereby reduced associated feelings of vulnerability. Unfortunately, not all actions successfully reduced uncertainty, as three teachers reported ongoing uncertainty despite taking a range of risk minimising actions. Additionally, teachers’ reported taking fewer actions when they perceived low or no risk towards the future event.

In addition to responding emotionally, teachers reported taking the following actions:
• seeking reassurances and building confidence;
• seeking and or accepting help from other;
• preparing, including planning and checking;
• building knowledge for clarity and understanding;
• taking measured risks or “trying things” as required; and
• selecting others to interact with.

While there were similarities in the actions taken between their observations, there were also qualitative differences in the way teachers engaged in these actions. These differences for the most part, depended on the level of perceived risk for the teacher at that particular time. Teachers also reported avoiding certain actions and selecting who they interacted with. These similarities and differences by level of perceived risk are summarised in Table 4.1 and elaborated on next.

Table 4.1 Relationship Between Perceived Level of Risk and Teacher Actions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response to perceived risk</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Level of perceived risk</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seek reassurance</td>
<td>Don’t seek reassurance</td>
<td>Seek reassurance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek help</td>
<td>Seek and accept help</td>
<td>Conditional seek &amp; accept help</td>
<td>Avoid seeking expert(^a) help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare</td>
<td>Prepare or under-prepare</td>
<td>Additional preparation</td>
<td>Over-prepare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build knowledge</td>
<td>Knowledge building for clarity &amp; understanding(^b)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take risks</td>
<td>Accept and take risk</td>
<td>Conditional risk taking</td>
<td>Avoid risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of exposure</td>
<td>Self &amp; others</td>
<td>Self &amp; trusted others</td>
<td>Self</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. \(^a\) Expert refers to asking the facilitator or leader, only as a last resort. \(^b\) Knowledge building for clarity & understanding occurred across all levels of perceived risk

Seek reassurance

Teachers who reported not having confidence in being able to do what was expected took actions to reassure themselves that they were on the right track. These teachers double-
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checked their planning, initially by themselves; asked trusted others to check their work; and offloaded negative experiences to feel better, remove doubt, and improve their confidence. While these actions increased their confidence going into the event, this confidence was fragile and easily lost during the observation and feedback meeting. Only when they made sense of their event as successful did these teachers feel more confident and perceive the next event with less risk. Teacher T20 described using the Internet and trusted others to gain reassurance:

Oh yeah, there is always that research involved, and planning. That’s what I would normally do. So maybe for an observation you’re thinking oh, am I getting it all right - you just double check everything, . . . This is what I’m going to do - is that the right thing. So like when we just double-check with [the PL leader] again, is this what we’re supposed to be doing. And then I’ve got [teacher] who’s next to me and then we just confirm with each other, are we doing the right thing, before we go ahead and do it.

Seek help

Interestingly, some teachers did not ask for help from others, and when they did seek help, it was usually with trusted others, rather than leaders or facilitators. In fact, whom the teachers asked for help depended on their level of perceived risk. Those teachers who reported negligible or no risk reported asking for help from facilitators and PL leaders as needed, whereas the teachers who reported higher perceived risk were more likely to ask trusted others or try to work things through themselves. Teacher T12 below explained a willingness to ask a trusted other for help whereas the second teacher, Teacher T4 reflected on an unwillingness to ask for help and how this contributed to experiencing a lack of clarity. These teachers’ excerpts highlighted that asking for help was not straightforward:

I think that if I didn’t have the support of my mentor teacher then I would feel a lot more vulnerable . . . I never know them until I go and ask [my mentor] some questions and then I can find out - am I on the right page? So I have that confidence there.

I guess what would have helped me is not being afraid to actually ask ‘what do you want from me’ from the beginning. Rather than go through it being unclear and just guessing . . . I needed to ask them to give it to me in writing or say it in a more constructive way.
Implicit in asking for help is disclosing or sharing that you don’t know or don’t know how to do something, in effect making you vulnerable to another’s opinion. Teachers did not do this readily. Instead teachers selected trusted others with whom to share their vulnerability and therefore made decisions about whom to withhold it from. Teacher T11 reported seeking help from selected team members, “[They] have been very good; it’s been really nice to sit down and talk about what we’re going to do in our observations and how that’s going to fulfil the criteria”.

Two of the teachers, who reported high perceived risk, strong negative emotion and feeling confused in their PL, sought help from their facilitator as a last resort or when the facilitator instigated it. This occurred only after the actions they had taken by themselves and with trusted others had not broken the downward spiral of their learning experience.

*Prepare for an event*

In addition to knowledge building, all teachers reported preparing for an event. Most teachers (10/14) reported doing additional preparation prior to a classroom observation. This additional preparation included extra planning, checking, practising in class and implementing the feedback provided from earlier events. Teachers differed across the degree of additional preparation they engaged in, from over-preparing, as in designing special lessons, to some additional planning and checking. Teachers who reported being “really prepared” also reported higher perceptions of risk and vulnerability not necessarily accompanied by visible emotion. They reported that additional preparation lowered their perceived risk by removing as much uncertainty and vulnerability as possible. For example, one teacher planned special lessons all year to mitigate against perceived risks occurring during observations of practice. By taking these actions the teacher had increased the likelihood of success by avoiding being derailed during the observation. Teacher T9 explained:

> Again I always have like backup options, because I worry that the kids will be just staring blankly at me in front of [the facilitator] so – not only the learning intention, but a backup one, to keep the lesson flowing and getting record and stuff like that. It’s quite daunting, so you want to be prepared. . . . If I’m being observed, I need to make sure it’s a challenging enough lesson but that they realise what they’ve learnt before. So you’re trying to get that perfect mix. . . . So if I can’t remember what my next . . . Because you’ve got that pressure of a video or whatever. You’re thinking, oh I’ve got
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...to think of something now, ‘quick, on the spot’ – so you have that backup option ready to go.

Conversely, only those teachers who reported minimal risk reported doing little or no extra preparation for their lesson observations, presentations, or self-paced trialling of strategies.

Teachers, including those who reported lower levels of perceived risk, changed their level of preparation as a result of an unsuccessful previous observation. For example, Teacher T13 changed his/her approach as a result of a “flop”. This teacher described subsequent preparation as a predominantly cognitive and calculated, but necessary step for success:

The first time it was a complete flop where I completely missed the boat, and then the second one I really tried hard . . . The second one was very calculated and very pre-empted, where the third one was much more natural . . . And I don’t like a role-play sort of scenario because it’s fake, it’s not me. But sometimes you have to do that to get to that point where you’re natural.

The teachers may have learned to prepare differently or alternatively through a risk lens, they may have been motivated to minimise or prevent perceived risks occurring in subsequent observations.

Build knowledge for clarity

All teachers reported knowledge building with nearly all teachers reporting that they had spent time building their knowledge beyond the activities provided as part of their in-school PL meetings. They engaged in knowledge building to clarify and check their understanding of aspects of the PL. They did this to gain clarity and certainty over what they had to do as well as how to do it.

Teachers reported researching on-line, using the PL readings at home, talking with others and working through resources in their teams. There did not appear to be differences across teachers based on their level of perceived risk for knowledge building. Teacher T19 explained a need for clarity:

I’ll probably do more professional reading [in the vacation]. They gave us some books and I’ll probably look at it and just clarify in my brain what is – in more detail. I just haven’t had that detail that I need . . . I’ll take in key words, but I won’t actually process the information.
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*Take measured risks*

Teachers made decisions about the conditions they felt safe to take risks and measured the amount of risk they considered acceptable when making changes to their practices. Those teachers, who framed their events with higher risk, were less likely to take risks and when they did they were likely to be conditional on other factors. For example, teachers tried new practices with their students in their classrooms but selected ‘safer’ options they were confident with to share with others. For example, Teacher T12 expressed a preference to take safe options, “here in a professional [place] I don’t want to show my faults. It’s your self-efficacy in that area”. In this case it was the work context that determined the level of risk taken whereas for others the level of risk was determined by their perceptions of risk related to a specific observer.

Teachers talked about risk taking as a necessity for their learning however, some of them found it difficult to take these risks. For example, Teacher T16 was aware of the relationship between risk and learning but this did not make it easier for them. This teacher reflected, “I understand it’s something you need to do. You need to take risks in order to make gains, so I do understand that, and I am working towards trying to take more risks”. Other teachers spoke of tolerating risk to learn. Teacher T13 reported, “And I’ll take risks, even if I fail, and keep on taking risks because I want to move forward”. Despite preparation and knowledge building aimed at reducing uncertainty and vulnerability, there were still unknowns and risks involved in new learning.

The teachers who did not frame their professional learning as risky were confident to try out new things. They continued to try and use the new strategies, especially after they evaluated that using the new strategies made a difference for their students.

*Select level of exposure*

Outside of formal PL events, teachers made decisions about to whom they exposed their practice based on the level of perceived risk. Teachers with higher perceptions of risk and vulnerability worked in the first instance with those they knew and trusted, and asked others such as facilitators and PL leaders once a relationship was built. In contrast, those teachers who perceived less risk were happy to ask the facilitators for help from the start of the PL.

To summarise, there were similarities in the actions teachers took in response to their perceptions of risk, however, each teacher selected their own set of actions and amount of
risk taking that was responsive to their individual experience and sensemaking. These responses and actions impacted on teachers’ learning.

**Impact on learning**

Teachers responded to their perceptions of risk and feelings of vulnerability with emotion, cognition and action, ultimately impacting on teachers’ learning-related experiences. To a greater extent this impact on learning was determined by the relative balance of emotion and cognition on action. Strong negative emotion, as a response to existing or up-dated perceived risk and feelings of vulnerability, impacted on teachers’ capacity to learn from the PL. At these times, emotion affected teacher actions and cognition more than at other times. Successive negatively framed events impacted further on teachers’ learning.

Next I report on the impact of teachers’ perceptions of risk on learning at three time points: before, during, and after an event. I then finish by reporting how two teachers who experienced high perceptions of risk and feelings of vulnerability responded to their ongoing negatively framed experiences to improve their learning. Their more intense emotional experiences enabled me to gain a closer more nuanced look at the impact of risk on learning. Excerpts from their transcripts are used throughout that section.

**Before an event**

Teachers’ level of perceived risk and feelings of vulnerability influenced their preparation for future PL events. As reported earlier, teachers with higher perceptions of risk were more likely to engage in extra preparation, seek reassurance and take fewer or safer risks in the practices they delivered in order to avoid, or at least lower the perceived risks involved. They were also less likely to seek help, which negatively affected their learning. Teachers who had not sought help reported wishing they had.

In addition, teachers reported considering a number of factors including uncertainty inherent in the classroom; their personal tolerance of uncertainty; their known responses to being observed; as well as what they were expected to deliver. For example, Teacher T20 explained the preparation taken before an event:

> Sometimes you just don’t like negative feedback, but I suppose it’s something that I can learn from, I need to take that on board. I tend to stress a lot before the observation and I tend to try and get everything in place to make sure that I’m prepared, that my kids are prepared, that everything falls into place. That’s who I am,
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so I tend to stress over observations. . . . I’ll just be taking a look at whatever I’m
teaching with a fine-toothed comb, going through with much more detail than I would
normally do it . . . although I know what I’m teaching, because of my emotions I tend
to get stressed and I sometimes react differently in that situation. I want it all to fall
into place, so that’s why I make sure that I have everything in place if I know that I’m
having an observation.

On the one hand, this extra preparation lowered the teacher’s perceptions of risk and potential
emotion during the event and in doing so increased the likelihood of a successful outcome.
However on the other hand, this preparation may also have lowered the amount of risk taken
and potentially constrained learning.

During an event

Teachers’ perceptions of risk manifested as emotion during an event, with this impacting on
cognition and learning. Teachers brought differing amounts of emotion as nervousness or
stress into the event. They talked about the effect of this heightened emotion on their lesson
delivery, mostly as being distracted, preoccupied or thinking about other things. This
contrasted to the flow they associated with everyday teaching. Thinking about other things
included: critiquing their practice during the event, self-doubt while teaching, their “mind’s
racing at a hundred miles per hour” (T19), and feeling under pressure. These additional
thought processes added to their cognitive load. Teacher T10 explained the differences in
cognition between being observed and during regular teaching:

When no-one’s there, you tend to go with your lesson, go with the flow. When
somebody’s there suddenly in the back of your mind you’re thinking, oh, my gosh, is
that what I ask kids? Is that how it works? You’re suddenly critiquing yourself on the
spot because you feel somebody else is critiquing what you’re doing.

When I’m being observed, my thinking and my peripheral vision is actually on the
observers, regardless of where they are in the room. . . . So your focus is not exactly
on the group that you’re working with.

Some teachers indicated that the extra cognitive demands on their thinking, during an event
where their practice was exposed, led them to forget things and interrupted their ability to
make decisions quickly. This reduced their performance, which in turn further increased
their negative emotion during the observation. Teacher T19 explained the dynamic influence
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of emotion during observations: “Because sometimes when you are under that pressure point of being observed you feel like you can’t do it or you miss out your reflections or some students can’t contribute and then you panic”.

In contrast, teachers with lower perceptions of risk and vulnerability reported having cognitive control over their delivery. For example, the following teacher spoke of differences in delivery between planned and unplanned observations. Teacher T7 reflected:

"I think you become more observant of what you’re supposed to be doing. . . . you know what some of the stuff they're looking for, . . . and all those sorts of things and you make sure that's emphasized more . . . , it sometimes feels too fake, that you've organised yourself just for that lesson for that person. I'd rather have a real situation where you're going to get things wrong, and you don't care. Well you do care, but you're not worrying that you're making mistakes because that's part of what – . . . You know, those little things that you naturally do, but you swap over for when someone's organised to come in.

This teacher did not report the presence of emotion; furthermore the teacher used cognitive processes to support lesson delivery during an observation. When the balance of emotion and cognition tipped away from emotion teacher learning was no longer compromised. The presence of perceptions of risk and associated emotion made lesson delivery more challenging and less likely to promote learning than for those who did not perceive risk.

After an event

Teachers reported varying intensity and valence of emotion after an event depending on their sensemaking of that event. Valence refers to the positive/helpful or negative/harmful judgment of the emotion. Perceived success after an event such as an observation led to positive emotions such as pride and relief. This reduced teachers’ perceptions of risk for future events and fostered an ongoing willingness to try things. These positive outcomes of learning were common.

On the other hand, perceived lack of success in the event, immediately escalated teachers’ negative emotion towards follow-up events. Teachers in this PL, for example, were commonly expected to attend a feedback meeting with the observers shortly after the observation. Strong negative emotional responses experienced by teachers impacted significantly on the teacher’s capacity to learn during these feedback meetings. I use examples from two teachers who experienced strong negative emotions and high perceptions
of risk and vulnerability to show three ways their capacity to learn was interrupted. I use the pseudonyms of Sally and Marie for these teachers.

First, the escalated negative emotion dominated cognition even if only temporarily for these teachers. Strong negative emotion influenced what cues the teachers used to make sense of their experience. They predominantly noticed negative cues and ignored or were unable to process the positive cues in the event, thereby making sense in a more negative way, which in turn increased their negative emotional response further. Sally and Marie shared their negative post-event experiences; the triggers for their negative emotional responses; the cues they used to make sense of the experience; and their escalating feelings of vulnerability after an observation and before the feedback meeting. They reported respectively:

> Because straight after your observation . . . it was the realisation when they left my room there was more comment made about how oh we’ll just – I can see where you’ve gone wrong now. ‘I see what you’re missing now’, and then instantly I knew great, so this is going to be a really bad feedback session, and I was feeling a bit raw. . . . For me, it makes it hard, because I’m still processing what’s happened. Why these have or have not worked. It makes things harder for me – at the time it takes me a while for me to kind of put things in order. Because going straight into the feedback session afterwards, even though there’s one teacher in between, it’s nerve-wracking. The panic is still there.

> It suggested I’d failed because of the – they didn’t say ‘you have failed’ in so many words, but they did imply it, saying things like – like I said – ‘do you actually know what you’re doing?’, ‘I don’t think you understand this’. Yeah, it just makes me feel sad at them. Another thing that they focused on was more the negative things that I was doing in my practice rather than what I was actually doing right. So when they do that, it makes you think – without even wanting to think that way - that everything you did was wrong.

Second, they were less able to use and learn from the feedback session. High negative emotion and feeling confused dominated their sensemaking of the event. This prevented them from focussing on their feedback. Sally reported how her emotions interrupted her cognition and learning. She described the current and prior cues she had used to judge this new event as potentially negative, and her difficulty concentrating:
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So it was like 25 minutes, then boom you’re in there. I went into the feedback session still feeling confused, because someone else had said where I’d gone wrong but still it wasn’t articulated to me. It was just, something’s gone wrong and then from there it was a talk between two people and then telling me what I’d done and then I wasn’t hearing it. I pretty much didn’t listen to it, because I’d had enough by that stage.

Third, the negative emotion and sensemaking of the negatively framed event focused their attention inwards and increased feelings of vulnerability, thus the teachers became further distracted from their learning as they coped with the strong feelings of vulnerability. For example, as Sally attempted to make sense of her experience, she reflected on her actions taken prior to the observation in order to be successful and her surprise and immediate rush of negative emotions and increased feelings of vulnerability on realising she had been unsuccessful:

Like [I’d] just ‘had enough now, I don’t understand it’. I had talked this through with two people that said the lesson was great. They said the planning was great, everything made sense, so what have I done?

Marie also reported how her intense negative emotion increased her feelings of vulnerability as taking things personally overwhelmed her and made it more difficult to focus on her learning:

I tried my best in the observation and then [to] be told actually no, that’s wrong, I just took it a bit personally. . . . For me personally it was feeling first. I couldn’t separate it. Feeling bad I suppose and then focusing on what I actually need to improve on. That was hard.

Learning became increasingly uncomfortable for these teachers due to the increasing presence of intense negative emotion. As a result, their perceptions of risk and vulnerability increased making it difficult for them to learn from the scheduled PL.

Restoring the balance

The two teachers above who reported that strong negative emotion affected their learning reported how they restored their emotion-cognition balance. Their accounts provide some insight into the complex relationship of emotion and cognition in learning.

Both teachers were motivated to learn for their students and themselves. They were already taking actions such as knowledge building, preparing, seeking reassurance and asking trusted
others. They perceived risks each time they were observed knowing that previous events had resulted in failure. They also acknowledged they were confused about aspects of the PL and that their negative emotion impacted negatively on their learning. They experienced a downward spiral in their learning that was eventually broken by their own motivation to be successful and with additional support from others.

In follow-up interviews the two teachers reflected on the strategies they used to “push the emotion out” or “put them to one side” so they could restore the emotion-cognition balance to enable them to learn in the PL. Sally spoke of needing time to process the “event”. She spoke of reflecting on the experience, organising her thoughts and feelings, and restoring the balance prior to being able to learn:

*I think when things don’t go well you need that time to process it yourself before you can go in and listen to someone else, because you need that time to reflect on your own practice before someone else can tell you what you’ve done . . . I think I needed that time to be able to think about it: what had I missed or what had not gone well, and then come back the next day feeling a bit separated from it, to be able to talk about it.*

Whereas Marie reflected how she had learned how her emotions dominated and derailed her learning and that she could separate them to help her learn. She also spoke of being motivated by the needs of her students:

*But as it went on I realised that I could do that. It’s like, put your feelings to the side and focus on what you need to do properly. . . . I’ve never actually realised that I need to separate my feelings from the actual learning. . . . it was looking at my kids and their levels, the data and seeing how much they needed to move. That’s what triggered me to separate my feelings from actual learning.*

Their experiences highlighted the shifting balance of emotion and cognition in their learning, and the impact of perceptions of risk and vulnerability on this balance. Implicit in restoring the balance was being aware of the impact of perceptions of risk and vulnerability and the associated negative emotion on their learning. Sally reported that as a result of becoming aware of risk she was able to override her emotional responses during a later lesson observation. She explained:
You’re more aware of it. When you’re thinking about it or when you’re going in to something. Like you know this is a risk but you’re actually processing it as a risk and trying to talk yourself down from making it more of a big deal than it has to be. So it’s good. It’s like everything though: when you’re aware of it, you’re more able to understand it.

This teacher self regulated her emotion and focused on learning by framing feelings and emotions as perceptions of risk. Understanding perceptions of risk were helpful for this teacher’s learning.

Both teachers experienced increasing perceptions of risk and feelings of vulnerability as a result of negatively framing their PL experiences. Their sensemaking of each experience framed successive PL events increasing perceptions of risk and vulnerability even further. They struggled with the associated strong emotions that interfered with their learning. Only feelings of success after an observation lessened subsequent perceptions of risk for future observations.

**Summary of Finding Three**

Teachers responded to their perceptions of risk and feelings of vulnerability with emotion, cognition and action. Their emotional responses and actions impacted on their learning. Teachers took a variety of actions to increase their confidence and likelihood of a future event being perceived as successful by themselves and others. They did this by eliminating or minimising the perceived risks from occurring. If they achieved a successful outcome, teachers’ feelings of vulnerability and uncertainty subsequently reduced but did not disappear completely as there were no guarantees that they would be successful in each new event.

There were similarities in the types of actions teachers engaged in however, there were qualitative differences in the extent to which they carried them out. Additionally, teacher actions were for the most part carried out in ways that kept their feelings of vulnerability hidden from others.

Teachers’ actions taken in response to their perceptions of risk impacted on their learning both positively and negatively. This impact was determined to a greater extent by the shifting balance of emotion and cognition at the time. When negative emotion dominated cognition, the emotion biased what the teacher noticed; interfered with their ability to focus on learning; and distracted their attention inwards to increase feelings of vulnerability and
lessen learning opportunities. Successive negatively framed events impacted further on teachers’ learning. At these times, emotion affected teacher actions and cognition more than at other times.

**The Effect of the Event**

Finding Four: Teachers reported greater perceptions of risk when their practice was exposed to others to observe.

In Finding Four I report on the impact of the type of PL event, especially exposure of practice, on teachers’ perceptions of risk and their sensemaking of this. I begin with a short discussion on the PL events and exposure of practice, and then report the teachers’ sensemaking of how and why exposure mattered to them, and why video-recorded observations became connected with lower risk than in-class observations.

Teachers in this research were involved in a range of PL-related events usually jointly determined by the leaders and the facilitator(s). These events included but were not restricted to: whole staff PL sessions; observation and feedback events; teacher presentations; additional coaching sessions; and PL meetings. Additionally teachers tried new PL practices with their students. Events such as anticipated observations, either in person or video-recorded, along with feedback sessions featured more strongly than others in connection with higher perceptions of risk and feelings of vulnerability for teachers. As highlighted earlier in the section on vulnerability, these events contained elements of exposure of teacher practice.

Exposure of practice or being observed by others increased teachers’ feelings of vulnerability and risk. In the professional learning context, it was the difference between trying something with your students and trying something in the presence of a more expert other, who then gave feedback on the observed practice. Teacher T7 summed up exposure, “When I think about it, I think it’s about exposing your flaws”. The two scenarios are quite different in terms of exposure for teachers therefore it was not surprising that teachers held higher perceived risk in observations than trying things with their students in their classrooms.

Implicit in exposure is the potential for judgment to occur, whether intended by the observer or not. Teachers were uncertain how observers might respond to their observed practice, which created a potentially contestable process if there was disagreement over what was observed.
Teachers in Schools 1 & 3 were observed by both in-class and video recorded means, however the schools differed in their application of the practice. Teachers in School 1 were video recorded at the start of the PL for baseline data and again at the end of the year for improvement-related data. Teachers in School 3 were video-recorded after their first two in-class observations and continued throughout the rest of the year. These different applications of teacher-observation practices impacted in different ways. These differences are reported next.

Teachers in both schools initially preferred in-class to video-recorded observations. They explained that this was because videoing was a relatively new and unfamiliar process that they were uncertain about. Teachers in both schools reported less perceived risk in their end of year video-recording due to increased familiarity with the process, reduced self-consciousness from viewing oneself, and being motivated to look for improvements in their practice. Their original concerns over confidentiality and unfamiliarity with recording were mitigated by their positive experience connected with the first recording.

In addition to the familiarity-based reasons reported above, the teachers in School 3, who used the video recording for the majority of their observations, reported having greater control over the videoing process. This control lowered their perceptions of risk. The teachers selected what to record, share, and re-record if needed; felt more comfortable, and experienced less emotion during video recording without others in the room; and they could prepare for the feedback session by reviewing their recording. Teacher T20 recalled a change of mind and the reasons for it:

> Initially it wasn’t, because it wasn’t something that I did. But once you get into it you actually do find that it’s much easier to do the videoing than have someone in your classroom. . . . I think there’s two advantages to that, because you can always go back and look at it and do another video if you need to and also you don’t have someone in the classroom with you and you can also reflect on it.

The contestable nature of post-observation feedback was also reduced as both participants viewed the video recording together. This allowed teachers to explain their point of view. For example Teacher T19 stated, “I have some input into what I do wrong”. This was harder to do without the tangible evidence that the video provided.

Teachers also reported learning more from a video event. Most, but not all teachers reflected in private on what they did well and how they could improve prior to feedback. This reduced
their uncertainty and vulnerability before the feedback session began. In contrast to in-class observations there was no discussion of failure connected to video recording.

The differences in teachers’ perceptions of risk across the two types of observation indicated that when teachers’ perceived they had little control over their experience, their perceptions of risk and vulnerability increased and learning decreased. Overall, increased control over proceedings in the video recording and feedback meetings, coupled with reduced exposure and corresponding lower emotion during the video recording, resulted in teachers perceiving less risk and learning more from these experience.

Teachers from School 2 were not observed as part of their PL but were involved in events such as self-paced implementation of formative assessment strategies and one-off presentations to colleagues. Teachers reported low or negligible perceptions of risk in relation to these events however, many recalled negative experiences of observations in prior PL. Their reports emphasised the connection between type of event, exposure and perceptions of risk.

**Summary of Finding Four**

Teachers referred to some events more than others when they were asked about their responses and actions to perceived risk and vulnerability in PL. Events such as anticipated classroom observations, either in person or video-recorded, and their associated feedback meetings were strongly linked to teachers’ perceptions of risk. In contrast, events such as self-paced implementation of formative assessment strategies and one-off presentations to colleagues were linked to low or negligible perceptions of risk. The type of event, amount of exposure and perceived control were linked to the level of perceived risk and vulnerability. In addition to the type of PL events, the actions of others impacted on teachers’ perceptions of risk. This is addressed in RQ2, reported next in Chapter 5.
Chapter 5: Actions of Others on Perceptions of Risk

This chapter presents the main finding from the second research question, which focuses on the impact of others’ actions. Research question two asked:

• How do the actions of others mediate teachers’ perceptions of risk and sensemaking of professional learning?

I begin by positioning this finding in relation to earlier reported findings, along with the data sources used. I then explain how the interactions between the teachers and others in the PL were conceptualised, followed by an overview, before elaborating in detail on this finding.

Positioning the findings from RQ2

Research question two explored how the actions of others directly or indirectly mediated teachers’ perceptions of risk. It aimed to understand teachers’ perceptions of the impact of others on their uncertainty, feelings of vulnerability, and willingness to take risks in their learning.

Others refers collectively to those participants who held leadership positions in the school and or the PL. This included principals; facilitators; school leaders, some directly and others not directly involved in this PL; and teachers who were also learning to lead PL. For this analysis, others did not include teaching colleagues or non-school persons.

Findings from RQ1 reported on teachers’ overall sensemaking of perceptions of risk. To recap, uncertainty connected to relationships with others, and states of knowledge were two key sources of uncertainty for teachers in their assessment and evaluation of perceptions of risk in the PL. Teachers needed certainty and connectedness in their relationships to take risks and they also needed to feel confident and certain in their knowledge. If not, their perceptions of risk increased and they were less likely to take risks in their learning. Overall teachers’ perceptions of risk reduced the longer they were in the PL, however uncertainty connected to relationships and states of knowledge remained central to teachers’ perceptions of risk, as these were responsive to teacher’s on-going sensemaking of each new interaction and introduction of new learning.

Implicit in these findings were contextual and people factors, as perceptions of risk cannot be separated from these influences. Thus, Finding Five goes beyond these earlier reported findings, and reports in greater detail on the sense teachers made of the impact of others on
uncertainty connected to their relationships and knowledge, thereby impacting on their perceptions of risk and learning in the PL.

The data source used to address RQ2 relates to all twenty-one teachers’ responses when they were asked to reflect on what others did to increase or decrease their perceptions of risk in PL. Teachers’ responses were not restricted to their current PL; therefore to avoid misrepresentation teacher responses are not reported by school.

I conceptualised the teacher-other interactions by focusing on teachers’ sensemaking of others’ actions. Others took actions intended to support teachers as part of their involvement in the PL, ultimately driven by wanting improvement in student achievement. Teachers did not respond to or necessarily understand others’ intentions but made sense of the consequences of others’ actions on them in ways that either increased or decreased their perceptions of risk as illustrated in Figure 5.1.

![Figure 5.1](image.png)

**Figure 5.1.** Illustration of the conceptualisation of teacher sensemaking of others’ actions. PoR= perceptions of risk.

There were many PL events and other in-school happenings that were occasions for teachers to use to make sense of others’ actions. These included but were not restricted to: whole staff PL sessions, observation and feedback events, presentations to and by teachers, specially organised coaching sessions, team meetings, regular staff meetings and any number of everyday interactions. In many of these occasions, multiple participants added to the complexity of each situation. Teachers noticed or selected cues from the immeasurable number available to make sense of what was happening for them at that time in that place. This sensemaking of others’ actions contributed to their overall perceptions of risk. While many of the actions of others decreased teachers’ perceptions of risk and feelings of vulnerability, some actions unfortunately had the opposite effect.
Impact of Actions of Others

Finding Five: Teachers’ perceptions of risk were responsive to the actions of others, that is, principals, school leaders, and facilitators. Teachers’ perceptions of risk decreased in the presence of supportive relationships and successful learning and increased when these were not present or when the actions of others challenged their personal and professional identities.

Teachers reported that the actions of others impacted directly on their perceptions of risk and learning. In this finding I focus on the actions of others on teachers’ relationships, and knowledge building, as well as their cumulative effect on teachers’ perceptions of risk and learning. They are organised as follows:

- Developing relationships that support learning;
- Building knowledge and putting theory into practice; and
- The cumulative effect of relationships and knowledge on perceptions of risk.

Developing relationships that support learning

Teachers reported that the relationships they had with others in their PL decreased perceived risks when they were viewed as supportive. Implicit in this supportive relationship were the notions of being known as a learner, being shown empathy and respect, feeling supported, and feeling trust. These are discussed in turn below yet in practice are inherently interconnected.

Known as a learner

Being known as a learner related to having others understand them and be responsive to their individual learning needs. In the initial interviews many teachers spoke of their ideal PL as meeting their needs rather than a “one size fits all” approach that they had experienced in the past. In their follow-up interviews teachers from all schools reported that the current PL had met this need. Teacher T9’s comments were indicative of others:

> It’s trying to cater for everyone and, like I said earlier, one size doesn’t fit all. . . . But in the end that’s what we did, cos we had this big matrix of teaching, and you just picked out the element that needed more focus for you.

Teachers spoke positively about having individual goals, one on one coaching, and having the PL matched to them. One example of meeting individual teacher needs was when a
facilitator organised a special meeting in response to feeling concerned about a teacher. In the meeting, the principal, who had an existing positive relationship with the teacher, supported the teacher to share her confusions and concerns. As a result of this meeting, the teacher’s PL experiences and learning improved. This teacher’s reflection (intentionally unidentified) highlighted the connection between a supportive relationship and decreasing perceived risk through facilitating the sharing of concerns or vulnerability:

*The principal was great to talk to about it cos I could just go and be like, I’m just lost or whatever. [The principal’s] a really good support person for me. Yeah, [the principal] will listen to me and then try and find a way to improve a situation . . . because you feel the supportive environment. . . . for me, understanding things and having people understand me more.

I think that eliminated a lot of my fear. [The facilitator’s] understanding of me now and knowing that I just need that time to process things. But even setting the goals this time, just talking me through the matrix and where I’m at. And from then it’s been really great and everything seems to have slotted in really easily for me since then, and been really easy for me to understand, whereas before that it was really difficult.*

Being known as a learner encompassed more than *others* being aware of and meeting the teacher’s cognitive needs. It involved the actions of *others* demonstrating they understood or wanted to understand the teacher on social and emotional levels as well. In this next excerpt Teacher T16 retold how a leader supported them as a learner, on more than a cognitive level:

*We talked about it at meetings, and instead of focussing on more of the clarity book, we actually focused on our journey, what we wanted to get out of it, what our next step was and then how to achieve it.

[The leader] would be like, “Run me through the lesson that you’re going to do,” and so we’d go through it and [the leader] would be like, “And you feel comfortable with it?” and I’d say yes. . . . So [the leader] gave us the guidance to achieve. . . . we would go away feeling comfortable and it took away that element of fear when you were going into the observation, because no-one had really checked what you were going to do. It’s not like [the leader] was checking - ‘how do you think this is going to go?’*
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Shown empathy and respect

Closely connected to knowing the teacher as a learner, teachers perceived others to show empathy and respect when others considered their point of view and did not make assumptions about them and their learning. Teachers valued being consulted and involved in co-construction of their learning as Teacher T3 reported, “if [the leader] wasn’t sure of anything, they’d ask and I’d just explain it”. On the other hand processes perceived as top-down and/or the person appearing superior impacted negatively on teacher’s feelings of worthiness. Teacher T8 and T5 from different schools reported respectively about the negative impact of not feeling valued:

I just want someone that doesn’t come in and pretend that they’re the expert on everything and make you feel bad about the thing that you’re doing.

[It implied] ‘I don’t care about your opinions’. And when staff feel valued and respected in their work, they work harder.

In many ways this aspect of a supportive relationship was about others’ actions demonstrating empathy or showing they had considered the impact of their actions on the teacher, thus minimising unintended consequences. In this next excerpt Teacher T12 suggested a preferred method of feedback that included positives in addition to focusing on areas for improvement:

Yes, yes. But yeah, in the past, when I’ve had someone criticise things that I’ve done, often all I needed was for it to be done in the context of me as a whole – rather than just saying, ‘hey this is a thing you’ve done wrong’. But for me as a whole, ‘you’re doing all these things well as well.’ But often when we forget to mention those things, with our students, if that’s all you focus on is the negative or some area of improvement, then that’s where it starts to take a toll on your self-efficacy.

This extract was indicative of other teachers who perceived some of their feedback negatively. Feedback for the teachers was more than a commentary on what was wrong or needed to improve. It unavoidably impacted on them and their learning.

Feeling supported

Feeling supported referred to the help teachers received during and between facilitator visits. Support for teachers with the PL was particularly strong in one school where there were additional knowledge building and sharing opportunities for teachers between facilitator
visits. This was not as common in the other two schools, which placed more responsibility on teachers to ask for help.

Teachers reported feeling supported in their PL when they were not left to do it on their own. This was accomplished by checking in on the teachers in ways that were not perceived as monitoring, surveillance or akin to judgments. Teachers talked of the differences between feeling nurtured not pushed, comforted not demoralised and having their emotions and feelings considered. Teacher T8 explained what being supported was in contrast to another situation where this teacher had felt less supported:

_I guess being familiar with people helps and supports - like being supported to do it rather than just told ‘do it’ and thrown in . . . Like [the leader] actually came in and checked that we were all going all right all the time, whereas previously we’ve been just left to it. But [the leader] always checked in and asked if we needed anything and sent us stuff. Yeah, [the leader] did the job._

Being available to support was not sufficient for all teachers to voluntarily make use of the help that _others_ offered. As reported earlier in Finding Three, teachers who reported higher perceived risk were more likely to ask trusted others or try to work things through themselves. Some teachers reported being reluctant to ask those in leadership positions for additional help. Teacher T13 shared reasons for not asking school leaders despite them being available:

_I basically have to ask for that to happen. So it would have been nice if there was a structured meeting, [that I didn’t have to arrange]. . . . And [they] are very available for academic and curriculum leading, but you have to approach them._

Teachers may not have wanted to impose on school leaders’ time or alternatively these teachers may have had perceptions of risk and feelings of vulnerability in asking those in more powerful leadership positions for help. Teachers inferred barriers in approaching those in leadership positions when they were not confident in their state of knowledge and or their relationships.

On the other hand teacher T1 who reported no perceptions of risk was comfortable to ask for help when they felt stuck:

_They’ll discuss with you if you’re stuck or you need something or need help on something, yeah. I get on really well with [my leader] and I’ve always been able to_
 Feeling supported was also reflected in teachers’ comments about facilitator attributes. Teachers commonly emphasised facilitators’ approachability and friendliness, with being made to feel at ease an important attribute.

Feeling trust

The notion of trust connected and resulted from all of the above. Feelings around trust were implicit in teachers being able to take risks in their learning, share their weaknesses and be vulnerable with confidence and certainty that others would respond to their actions in positive ways. In particular, the presence of trust meant that others would respond to their needs respectfully, maintain confidentiality, and be mindful of the effect of their actions on them. Others showed this by not challenging teachers’ personal and professional identities, and emotional security. In other words, teachers felt secure that their feelings of vulnerability would not increase.

Experiences that impacted negatively on teacher-others’ trust usually occurred when teachers’ competence was challenged publicly. This resulted in teachers responding emotionally and increased their perceptions of risk and feelings of vulnerability as discussed in Finding 3. Trust acted to protect the teacher from emotional harm and reduce the likelihood of increasing perceptions of risk for the recipient. Teacher T8 explained, “So you need the trust so that you feel okay about getting maybe some not so good feedback. You need that because otherwise you don’t take it well”.

Teachers needed trust in their relationships with others to facilitate their risk taking. On the one hand high levels of trust lowered perceived risks or encouraged teachers to take risks whereas on the other hand teachers were less willing to ask for help if trust was not present. These comments from Teachers T19 and T4 respectively, reflected trust in the facilitator’s motives:

*Because I have that relationship with them, I feel comfortable, and I know what they’re giving to me would benefit my class.*

*When it’s [the facilitator] I know that [they’re] coming in to help me . . . . so it’s not as nerve-wracking.*
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Some teachers described an absence of a relationship in a neutral sense implying trust and support were not yet sufficiently present to encourage sharing of vulnerability. One teacher reflected on a lack of sharing at the beginning of the PL as something not yet present: “Maybe I wasn’t open enough to want to talk about it more” (T16).

Supportive relationships, when present, impacted positively on teacher learning and risk taking. The quality of the relationship decreased teachers’ perceptions of risk and feelings of vulnerability thereby increasing teachers’ certainty that they could take risks in their learning and share their weaknesses confident that they would be supported and respected, and that their competence would not be threatened or shared with others. This feeling of trust, in turn motivated further learning.

**Building knowledge and putting theory into practice**

Knowledge building occurred on many occasions in the PL. This was a relatively comfortable process, driven by their personal goals and motivation, with teachers typically reporting the process as incremental, or building throughout the year. Most teachers were able to bridge the new learning and implement the new practices within the available PL processes. For teacher T1 who reported no perceived risks, the PL was “quite subtle how it all happened and it happened over that period of time and it was in - you started here and you worked your way to this area of learning”. Taking risks in learning was easier if the perceived risks were low and a positive result more certain.

Teachers spoke positively of the impact of facilitator workshops, especially the practical sessions and modelling of new practices. They reported these helped them understand the relevance of the new practices as well as seeing how the practices worked in a classroom. Teacher confidence increased as a result of this knowledge building. For example in the next excerpt, Teacher T19 reflected on participation in a facilitator run workshop. This response was indicative of other teachers:

*Well we got retrained, not retrained, they did another full day for us during the holidays on Teacher Only day and that gave us a boost of confidence to have more in depth knowledge about what assessment for learning is and what it entails and what you have to do so I’ve been trying to . . . and I just feel a lot more confident with my groups now and me getting into a habit and them getting into a habit and they’re starting to see the benefits and I’m starting to see the benefits.*
Teachers valued knowledge-building opportunities that helped them put the new learning into practice in their classroom.

Although providing additional knowledge-building opportunities were important they were not always sufficient to untangle a teacher’s confusions. Some teachers reported needing to talk about their confusions with a trusted other, that is, someone they had a supportive relationship with. When this sharing occurred, progress was made. If sharing did not occur, the confusion typically continued with increased perceptions of risk and feelings of vulnerability a likely outcome.

The person providing help needed deep knowledge and skills to make the knowledge accessible to the teacher who was experiencing confusion. One teacher spoke at length about how a PL leader, who was also a teacher, had made learning more accessible. This PL leader used their deep knowledge, most likely gained as a participant in the PL, to break the learning into smaller chunks for the teacher. This involved the PL leader having deep knowledge and understanding of the PL content, the learner, and how to make it accessible to the teacher. Teacher T16 explained what one leader had done, “Yes really broke into – like I was a child and I needed my learning intention, my modelling and my success criteria”.

In contrast, others lost their credibility if teachers perceived them to not have this deep knowledge. Teachers needed certainty that their PL leaders had the knowledge to steer them towards successful outcomes. Teacher T11 summed this up, “I think that they have to have a good knowledge of things in order to be leading, otherwise it’s just not going to work.”

These perceptions may or may not have been an accurate representation of leaders’ knowledge.

Others positively influenced knowledge building when they created a range of opportunities for learning, provided individual support when needed in addition to what had been scheduled, and matched the learning to the teacher when it really mattered. Success in knowledge building, measured by teachers’ sensemaking of their feedback as positive and through improved student outcomes, reduced uncertainty, built confidence, and motivated teachers to continue learning.

The cumulative effect of relationships and knowledge on perceptions of risk

As reported in Finding One, teachers’ perceptions of risk were inversely related to both the quality of relationships and each teacher’s state of knowledge. The cumulative nature of
these two sources of uncertainty on perceptions of risk was also proposed. This section uses these earlier-reported findings and those reported above on others’ impact on relationships and knowledge building to report on their combined effect on teachers’ perceptions of risk.

Teachers’ perceived that the quality of relationships combined with their state of knowledge, affected their perceptions of risk and learning. When teachers were confident in their states of knowledge they felt competent to do what was expected. At these times, teachers perceived less risk and were prepared to accept most perceived risk resulting from issues with the quality of their relationships. However, if the teachers’ perceived risks were connected to their poor state of knowledge, the quality of their relationship was paramount for them. Supportive relationships were essential for teachers to take risks when they were not confident or certain in their state of knowledge. In contrast, teachers perceived high risk in learning when they perceived they had low levels of knowledge and low quality relationships. This is summarised as a matrix in Figure 5.2.

![Figure 5.2. Matrix showing the combined effect of quality of relationships and level of knowledge on perceived risks in learning.](image)

Every interaction in the PL was an occasion for sensemaking as well as an opportunity for knowledge and relationship building. Supportive relationships were built through positively framed learning experiences. Observations and feedback sessions were powerful occasions for trust building or trust breaking because teachers’ practices were exposed to the judgment of others. The actions of others during these occasions were crucial as they provided opportunities for teachers’ competence and confidence to be challenged. There was a fine
line for teachers between others’ utterances framed as improvement and those framed as judgments of their practice or threats to their competence. Teachers were more likely to respond negatively to perceived judgments of their practice, thus increasing their perceptions of risk and vulnerability for subsequent events. Adding to the complexity of these occasions were teachers’ existing perceptions of risk and feelings of vulnerability at that time.

*Others*’ feedback to teachers impacted on teachers’ feelings of vulnerability and subsequent perceptions of risk, particularly if teachers felt they had worked hard and given their best effort. In this next extract, the teacher attempted to articulate the effect of perceived negative feedback on their identity as teacher:

> Yeah I'm willing to take the risk and try anything, but I think, like you've said, some things you're just not used to and not comfortable doing, so it feels a bit awkward to start with, yeah. But it really depends on what area too, like in terms of teaching, sometimes when people are observing and give feedback, it can really [help], if it's constructive and something to work on, sometimes it can be a real depressing - because if it's something that you've tried really hard in and you feel like you're doing your best, then some criticism comes in, then yeah it's pretty heavy to take, because it feels like someone's, I don't know - it's like a question of, are you a good teacher or not. (T12)

Teachers made sense of the impact or consequences of others’ actions on them. This *sense* informed their perceptions of risk and either increased or decreased them. Teachers’ perceptions of risk and feelings of vulnerability escalated if their confidence and professional identity had been challenged as in the previous scenario. At these times, teachers perceived greater risks and vulnerability in each subsequent occasion where further threats to their personal and professional identity might occur. It was not surprising that teachers displayed strong emotions and displayed less willingness to engage in the PL as a consequence of experiencing the negative impact of others’ actions. Teachers’ perceptions of risk were responsive to the consequences of others’ ongoing actions across each occasion.

On the other hand, *others* viewed teachers’ strong emotion in these situations differently. Leaders and facilitators may not have considered teachers as learners or that teachers may experience perceptions of risk in their learning. Additionally they may not have considered their impact on teachers’ emotional responses, perceptions of risk, and willingness to engage in the professional learning.
Summary of Finding Five

Teachers’ perceptions of risk were responsive to the actions of others, that is, principals, school leaders and facilitators. The quality of the relationship between teachers and PL leaders and or facilitators, coupled with perceived confidence in their level of knowledge impacted on teacher learning. Without supportive relationships teachers perceived higher risk and were less likely to take risks with their learning. This was further exacerbated by low confidence in their current levels of knowing.

How others framed teachers’ emotional responses and actions is addressed in RQ3, reported next in Chapter 6.
Chapter 6: Leader and Facilitator Sensemaking

In this chapter I address the third and final research question by reporting on principals’, school leaders’ and facilitators’ sensemaking of teachers’ actions and responses. Research question three asked:

- How do the leaders and facilitators make sense of teachers’ emotional responses and actions in professional learning?

Again I begin by positioning the findings, state the data sources used, then report Finding Six, first as an overview followed by a detailed elaboration of the finding.

Positioning the findings from RQ3

This research question focused on leaders’ and facilitators’ sensemaking, in contrast to teacher sensemaking reported in the previous two findings chapters. I was particularly interested in how leaders and facilitators viewed non-engagement. Sensemaking connects cues to frames to make sense of what is going on (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010). Different frames result in different sensemaking as the frame influences or biases what is noticed. Thus the frames used to identify the problem, also assign responsibility for that problem. Additionally the problem frame determines and justifies the actions we take. Leaders and facilitators made sense of teachers’ actions through their existing frames, by noticing and connecting some cues and ignoring others in order to label or justify their view of teachers’ engagement in the PL. Additionally the quality of relationships between them and the teachers influenced the types of cues available for sensemaking. Leaders and facilitators also made assumptions about teacher learning with non-engagement often used synonymously with lack of learning.

The data source for this question came from interview transcripts with fourteen leaders and four facilitators across all three schools. I used field notes and observations of PL meetings to support my interpretation of the transcripts. Leaders (L1-L14) included three principals; nine school leaders, three directly and six not directly involved in this PL; and two teachers who participated as teacher-leaders in the PL. Collectively this group are referred to as leaders, or referred to by position, for example, principal, when the data reflected notable differences by that position. Data from the four facilitators are reported as a group, distinct
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from leaders. In transcript extracts principals and facilitators are referred to generically as principal or facilitator with no specific identifier.

The discussion that follows brings together the collective voice of the leaders and facilitators who participated in this research highlighting themes in their sensemaking, rather than identifying what individual leaders did. I begin by reporting the cues leaders and facilitators identified, followed by factors that influenced their selection. Then I discuss the frames leaders and facilitators used to make sense of teacher engagement in the PL explicitly comparing a frame of resistance to change with a frame of perceptions of risk. I refer to these frames as a resistance frame and risk frame. I report Finding Six next.

Comparing Resistance and Risk frames

Finding Six: Leaders and facilitators made sense of teachers’ actions and emotional responses in different ways depending on the cues they noticed and the frames they used. A resistance frame positioned non-engagement in the professional learning with the teacher thereby assigning the responsibility for change with them. On the other hand, a risk frame positioned responsibility for non-engagement with and beyond the teacher. Leaders and facilitators broadened their vision to consider their impact on teachers’ learning and engagement in the professional learning.

Cues noticed

Cues that are noticed provide an indication of the frames used. Leaders and facilitators made sense of teachers’ emotional responses and actions in the PL by selectively noticing what teachers said and did (or did not do) across the same range of PL and non-PL school events and activities that the teachers used to make sense of others’ actions reported in RQ2. They used these cues to make sense of teachers’ engagement and learning in the PL. The cues leaders and facilitators noticed, in addition to how they framed engagement, depended on their level of involvement, their content knowledge related to the PL, and their relationship with teachers. Collectively these factors, which changed over time, influenced what they noticed and also influenced the sense they subsequently made of teachers’ engagement in the PL.

Leaders and facilitators noticed teachers’ emotional responses and actions. They recalled strong negative emotional responses mostly related to events where teachers’ practices were exposed for others to view such as the introduction of video recording of classroom practice.
Leaders and facilitators commented on teachers’ anxiety levels, nervousness, and discomfort, as well as intense emotional responses such as tears.

Leaders and facilitators also commented on teachers’ outbursts of anger. These were commonly reported as teachers’ responses to frustration at not feeling successful or increases in workload connected with the PL such as when teachers were asked to do extra readings. Leaders and facilitators also noticed teachers’ relief and comfort when they felt successful. They inferred teachers’ level of engagement and confidence in the PL based on these emotion-based cues.

In addition to noticing emotional responses to PL activities, leaders and facilitators mentioned a wide range of teacher actions from which they selected cues to make sense of teacher engagement levels in the PL. The teacher actions by event are presented in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1 Teacher Actions by Event

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event types for</th>
<th>Teacher actions used to infer engagement and learning in the PL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observations of teachers’ PL practices in and beyond the formal occasions</td>
<td>Degree of PL implementation including absence or presence of expected practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Completion &amp; non-completion of PL tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Avoidance-related actions such as being absent and excuses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactions with teachers</td>
<td>Discussing knowledge related to PL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Openness or willingness to share</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responses to feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asking or not asking for help; checking lesson plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation of teachers’ everyday behaviour</td>
<td>Interest or engagement shown during meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-verbal cues such as body language, demeanour and confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Content of staffroom conversations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For example, some leaders inferred increased engagement by referring to the changing content of teacher talk in the staffroom. Other leaders used teacher completion or non-completion of readings, provided as part of the PL, to infer engagement. Both examples illustrate the wide pool of events that others selected cues from.

Leaders and facilitators accessed different cues due to the specific nature of their work and their level of involvement with the PL. This involvement varied across leaders and schools and provided them with access to different situations from which to select cues. While most involvement was directly related to their assigned PL role, principals’ involvement varied.
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across schools. For example, one of the three principals created an opportunity to be actively involved as a teacher with a group of students. This principal explained a need to get first-hand experience of the PL:

I think it's really important to be actively involved, because I need to know and we've been on projects where it's gone really well and it also hasn't. I don't want to hear from people complaining, saying that it didn't work or it didn't relate to them. . . . So I'm doing what everyone else is doing

Active involvement in PL provided this principal with an awareness of what was important especially in terms of evaluating teacher progress and engagement in the PL. Other leaders, who were not as involved in the PL, did not gain an in-depth understanding of the PL over the year, particularly an understanding of what was required by the teachers to implement the new knowledge and practices.

The facilitators’ and leaders’ current states of knowledge in the PL influenced the cues they noticed. As expected, facilitators began with more knowledge about the PL than leaders. This knowledge and experience of observing teacher practices enabled facilitators to notice more detail and nuances in teacher practices than the leaders.

Leaders directly involved in the PL became more knowledgeable due to their involvement as leaders working with the facilitators. This new knowledge enabled these leaders to become more skilled at noticing learning-related cues as the year progressed. For example, leader L10 commented on teachers’ progress after a year of PL, “Just from the teachers that I have observed, I’ve seen a huge progress, like in the sense that students have a better understanding of the learning outcomes of what the teacher wants them to learn”. This leader had gained knowledge during the year to measure progress. This was in contrast to negative comments made about teachers’ responses earlier in the year.

The quality of relationships between the teacher and the leader or facilitator also influenced the types of cues available for sensemaking. Leaders used existing knowledge and assumptions about teachers gained from their daily contact to notice changes in teacher engagement and learning whereas facilitators reported uncertainty in knowing the teachers as learners, particularly at the start of the year. To counter this, the facilitators deliberately scoped or questioned teachers at the start to find out more about each teacher and begin to build relationships with them. One facilitator explained:
I was really pleased that I was given the opportunity to interview every teacher first. That was really huge, because it gave me a far better insight into things and that’s something that I will carry on now, is interviewing every teacher as part of my scoping rather than just the senior leadership team, or at least every leader rather than just the senior leadership team. . . . I gained a totally different insight and understanding of where their issues might be rather than what the issues were that the senior leadership team had talked about.

The quality of relationships impacted on facilitators’ access to cues about a teacher’s state of knowledge. Some teachers did not readily share their confusions, lack of confidence or gaps in their knowledge. Facilitators reported that teachers were more likely to share this information once a strong relationship and level of trust was built. The following excerpt from one facilitator was indicative of others:

*Trust that they have, that it’s all okay. Just that openness of whether they can actually say, "Hey this is too much" or whatever.*

*Quite a few of the teachers are in that situation [trust] but there's still some that aren't or are very nervous or protective. But I don't think I've ever seen a school yet where everyone is like that, because you get different personalities.*

This level of trust necessary for sharing vulnerability was not present in all leader-teacher or facilitator-teacher relationships.

Teachers also did not share their concerns with leaders with whom they were not familiar. This made it more difficult for these leaders to understand what was happening for the teacher. In this next excerpt, Leader L2 was surprised by a teacher’s negative response to the PL. The leader attributed not knowing what had triggered the response to their lack of relationship. Leader L2 shared, “I don’t think [the teacher] would trust me to tell me, enough . . . . I don’t think we’re on that level where [the teacher] would tell me things”. Access to another’s thoughts and feelings depended on the quality of relationships.

Over time, leaders’ and facilitators’ knowledge and relationships with teachers changed due to their involvement in the PL. In general leaders involved in the PL became more knowledgeable about the PL and facilitators built relationships with the teachers with whom they worked. These changes made a difference to the cues they could access. Figure 6.1
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illustrates this changing relationship between PL involvement, knowledge, and relationships over time.

Figure 6.1. Change over time in knowledge and relationships from PL involvement.

For facilitators, the developing quality of their relationships with teachers provided them with access to a greater range of cues in relation to the PL, frequently from teachers more openly sharing concerns with them. In this next example one facilitator described how it took the full year for a teacher to share reasons for his/her actions when observed. The facilitator also shared misreading the teacher’s actions and responses as the teacher not trying hard enough to engage. The facilitator recalled:

*I really struggled. I tried to figure what is it that [the teacher’s] not getting. Cos it would be different every time. . . . It just seemed inconsistent, and I had thought, well maybe [the teacher’s] just not actually pulling their weight and thinking hard enough and making any changes. But it actually didn’t come out right until the last interview ‘oh I just really thought that that’s what you, I had to do what you wanted to see.’ ‘I was scared of doing it wrong.’ . . . it turns out that [the teacher’s] actually very very nervous . . .*

Leaders involved in the PL grew increasingly more aware of knowledge related cues, and facilitators were more able to access teachers’ concerns as long as their relationships with teachers continued to develop. They brought this information to their sensemaking of teachers’ actions and engagement in the PL. This was not the case for leaders not directly involved in the PL. In contrast, non-involved leaders were less likely to build their PL knowledge or improve their relationships with teachers as a result of the PL. They were more likely to notice cues in a general sense, simplifying their sensemaking to the presence or
absence of a practice to infer a teacher’s state of knowledge and engagement. For example, non-engagement in the PL may be inferred from the absence of learning intentions on a teacher’s whiteboard during an unplanned walkthrough. This assumption was not backed up by teacher reports.

In summary, leaders and facilitators noticed different types and nuances of cues from teachers’ actions and emotional responses depending on their level of involvement, their current PL knowledge which influenced what to look for, and the quality of the relationships with those they worked. These factors were dynamic and changed over time. Leaders and facilitators used these cues to evaluate teachers’ learning and make ongoing sense of teachers’ engagement in PL.

Leaders and facilitators’ existing frames around teacher learning and engagement in PL also influenced their awareness of cues and biased the cues those they noticed. Framing is discussed next.

**Framing and frames used**

Frames constructed through our past experiences enable us to quickly make sense of the cues we notice in the environment. Frames also drive and justify our responses. As such, frames often working together as a set of frames simplify our world and organise our experiences. Leaders and facilitators made sense of teachers’ actions and emotional responses in different ways depending on how they framed teacher engagement in PL. Their views on teacher engagement connected to how leaders and facilitators framed teacher learning.

In this next section I begin with a short account of leaders’ and facilitators’ framing of teacher learning. I then unpack their sensemaking of teachers’ emotional responses and actions firstly using a resistance frame followed by reporting similar incidences of teachers’ emotion and actions considered by leaders and facilitators through a risk frame.

**Framing teacher learning**

Leaders and facilitators held similar theories or frames about learning for teachers that informed their sensemaking of teachers’ apparent engagement and willingness to change their practice. While there were individual differences across the leaders and facilitators, the ideas discussed represent the views expressed by the majority of leaders and facilitators in their interviews. This common framing of teacher learning is reported as a wider frame or context from which to consider teacher engagement in PL.
Leaders and facilitators considered three aspects to their framing of teacher learning: knowledge, relationships and emotion. These three aspects separately and together influenced how leaders and facilitators made sense of teachers’ engagement in PL. Their views on knowledge, relationships and emotion influenced what they noticed, and impacted on how they responded. They are reported next.

Knowledge and learning

All leaders and facilitators viewed learning as a life-long journey of improvement. This view acknowledged individuals to be at different stages and make progress at different rates. This espoused view of learning also disputed the notion of learning as right or wrong, with leaders and facilitators placing importance on learning from mistakes. Implicit in this view was a necessary level of discomfort for the learner with learning expected to follow a non-linear path. Leader L1 reflected on discomfort in learning:

If you’re feeling confident and you already have the knowledge, where’s the new learning? Doesn’t there have to be some sort of risk? . . . So it wouldn’t have to be that you feel as if your world’s going to cave in or anything, but there has to be a challenge and yeah a bit of a challenge. A challenge at the least; discomfort going all the way down to risk

Knowledge, or more specifically the building of new knowledge, was viewed as fundamental to PL. Facilitators and PL leaders believed they needed to be more knowledgeable than the teachers they supported in the PL. Leader L5 shared,

In order for me to be able to be effective for my team, I had to make sure I was informed. I had to get informed by doing that as well. There was no way I was going to go in and pretend I knew stuff when I didn’t.

Despite a diversity of views on whether knowledge was needed prior to participating in the PL or gained through participation, many leaders and facilitators perceived teachers’ lack of knowledge as a problem in the PL. For many, knowledge building was perceived as the successful transmission and reception of knowledge from one person to another. Additionally, the provision of knowledge and skill building activities was viewed as the role of the facilitator and leaders however; they still viewed teachers as responsible for their own learning.
**TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RISK IN PL**

**Relationships and learning**

All leaders and facilitators espoused that quality relationships supported teacher learning. They believed quality relationships improved teacher willingness, lowered risk and made learning safer for everyone. They also perceived their relationships with teachers as dynamic and as a result could be built and or jeopardised by their actions. Leader L1 explained:

>I think you have to build relationships, and it all comes down to the relationship you have with that teacher. Understanding, or trying to understand, what works for them as in individually? For some people coming into their classroom during class time immediately builds a wall, . . . It’s all about relationships and actually finding that other stuff about them. I think you need to focus on their strengths and be quite vocal about that in a genuine way.

Facilitators reported deliberately building relationships with teachers to support their work in schools. They acknowledged the tension between building relationships and challenging learning. This facilitator’s comments were indicative of all facilitators in the research.

>My role then really is to develop a relationship with them, that relational trust so that you can then make some shifts and that they see the need to change and to do something differently, that sort of role. But it is to challenge them as well. It's to nurture them but to nudge, that sort of stuff. ... But it's about knowing how much you can challenge someone, like how big a chunk you can do.

Leaders and facilitators described quality relationships as possessing an added factor in contrast to regular relationships. This added factor was described variously as including: a bond, trust, closeness, openness, familiarity, knowing others, and being known. Not all relationships with teachers were perceived to include these factors.

A learning as improvement focus led leaders to espouse their role as mentors, supporting teachers as learners in knowledge and skill building. They rejected the role of “fault finders” as detrimental to learning. Examples of the way leaders and facilitators described support included: not being judgmental or monitoring, doing as promised, existing in and beyond the classroom, and providing safety to take risks described as “catching you when you fall”.

**Emotion and learning**

Emotion was linked to leaders’ and facilitators’ conceptions of learning however, emotion and emotional responses were more likely to be viewed negatively and labelled troublesome.
Emotion was not usually linked to impacting learning. An exception to this was at times of confusion in learning where some visible emotion was considered an acceptable, yet temporary part of the learning process.

For the most part, leaders and facilitators made sense of teachers’ negative emotions connected to exposure or observation of their practice as inevitable. They expected any visible emotion to lessen over time due to increased familiarity with events associated with the PL. The following excerpt, indicative of others, illustrated this normative view of emotion connected with exposure:

*I hear this from heaps of principals and leaders in schools, that there's always that anxiety and risk around being watched and being - having observations. It doesn't matter how long you've been doing it, it still tends to pop up, and I know that they do.*

(L14)

By framing emotional responses as expected and likely to reduce over time, leaders and facilitators justified the presence of negative emotion and their responses to it. For example, all the principals expected teacher emotion but were clear that emotional responses would not interrupt the PL. The extracts below from the three principals, highlighted their acceptance of emotional responses alongside their strong need for change:

*I just acknowledge it. I say, I understand you're nervous, but it's important for me to do this and I'm going to so that's it. . . . I understand there's these feelings, but I also don't want them to be an excuse for people not to do it.*

*One of the things that required, could be discomfort, but again goes back even to my role as a leader, is that doing the same old and getting the same old results is no longer good enough.*

*Oh there's always a risk in change management reform - there’s always a risk. Yeah, you're always going to upset someone, but at the end of the day there has to be some collateral damage*

In these examples the three principals acknowledged the presence of emotion but did not consider emotional responses as their responsibility. They, like most of the leaders and facilitators in this research, viewed emotion as a teacher problem, and as a result bypassed or avoided teachers’ responses.
Leaders and facilitators did make reference to teachers’ positive emotion and or level of comfort, usually in relation to a noticing a change in teacher response to the PL. For example, Leader L12 provided an example of a teacher’s changed disposition and implied a change in engagement level. The teacher “was one of the more difficult ones to shift earlier on in the year…[this teacher’s] shining by the time it got to term four”.

Overall, leaders and facilitators framed emotional responses as problematic. Even though expected, teacher emotion was an unwelcome problem in the PL setting. The leaders’ and facilitators’ espoused theories or framing of teacher learning contributed to their overall sensemaking of teachers’ engagement in PL. Leaders’ and facilitators’ sensemaking of teacher responses and actions is reported next.

Making Sense of Teachers’ Responses and Actions

As part of their interviews, leaders and facilitators considered teachers’ responses and actions in relation to teacher engagement in the PL. They typically referred to teacher resistance and made assumptions about teacher learning by linking apparent non-engagement to indicate a lack of learning. In addition, they were asked about their theories on risk, and the possible links between risk and willingness for teachers trying new practices in PL. In Year Two, leaders and facilitators were also deliberately asked about their theories of teacher resistance. (See Appendix C for the focus of interviews). Perceptions of risk in learning was a new way of framing teacher actions and emotional responses in PL for half of the leaders who had not considered teachers’ perceptions of risk in relation to PL prior to this research. On the other hand all facilitators had already linked risk and PL due to ongoing professional learning within their organisation on perceptions of risk in learning and facilitation.

In this next section I use examples from leaders’ and facilitators’ interview transcripts to unpack their sensemaking of teachers’ emotional responses and actions. I do this firstly through a resistance frame followed by reporting their responses to similar incidences of teacher emotion and actions through the alternative risk frame. In practice, the leaders and facilitators often used a mix of both resistance and risk frames at the same time.

Framing Through a Resistance Frame

In this research teachers’ resistance to change is seen as teachers deliberately choosing not to do something. A resistance frame led leaders and facilitators to consider teachers as either resistant or not resistant to the PL, however they held multiple theories about why teachers
resisted change. Implicit in these theories of resistance were that teachers themselves did not want to change, thus positioning the problem and responsibility for non-engagement in the PL firmly with the teacher.

Leaders and facilitators expected some teachers to resist the PL and therefore considered resistance to change normal. They made assumptions about a teacher’s likely resistance in the first instance based on their prior knowledge and personal experiences of that teacher. Leader L11 explained: “that’s pretty much an assumption. Based on the fact that some people will change or they’ll be away or you know, all that sort of evidence that you see and you just sort of build up over time”. Despite accepting the ideas were assumptions, the leader framed them as facts and evidence.

Leaders and facilitators also referred to leadership and change literature that classified groups of employees by their approach to change to justify the presence of resistance. For example, one principal explained teachers’ resistance as expected based on theories found in leadership texts:

    I expect one or two well-poisoners not to understand, not to be able to develop the 
    open mind that is required but I want to be very much near 90% of the staff. . . . I can 
    see, that I’ve identified and there have been no surprises, people who resent this 
    contract.

Thus, teacher resistance to change was an expected and accepted response to professional learning for change.

**Explanations for resistance framed non-engagement**

Leaders and facilitators provided explanations for teacher resistance. The most common reasons for resisting change, reported in descending order of occurrence with sub-categories and frequency data were:

1. Lack of knowledge (17/18)
2. Teacher themselves resisting change: (16/18)
   - personality and disposition (13/18)
   - conflicting beliefs (10/18)
   - poor work ethic (9/18)
   - prefer status quo (8/18)
3. Fear of exposure or failure, and being judged (9/18)
These reasons centred on factors within and about the teachers themselves, framing the teacher as responsible for resisting change. Leader L11 summed this up as, “there’s going to be two reasons really isn’t there? I don’t want to do it, just because I don’t, or I don’t know how to do it, so I’m going to pretend that I don’t want to”. The reasons hypothesised by leaders and facilitators for resisting change are discussed in order next.

Lack of knowledge was stated or inferred as the most common reason for teachers to resist change. This was not surprising as leaders and facilitators believed successful knowledge building was fundamental for success in PL. Leaders and facilitators believed that teachers who resisted had an existing lack of curriculum knowledge needed for the PL or struggled with the new learning. Leader L6 suggested both of these as reasons for problems with engagement, “Lack of knowledge themselves as teachers. …problems that we may have had were, not being prepared, and not doing the reading, so don’t have the knowledge base therefore behind them to be successful”. Lack of knowledge was also implicated as the underlying cause of fear of exposure and the consequence of poor work ethic. In most cases apparent lack of knowledge was equated with lack of learning.

The second most common reason posited by leaders and facilitators referred to the teachers themselves resisting change. They referred to personality or disposition, conflicting beliefs, work ethic, and preferring the status quo as reasons for teachers not engaging or resisting change. These reasons located the problem firmly within the teacher.

Personality or disposition was reported as a contributing factor to explain the resistant responses leaders and facilitators observed. These beliefs around personality and disposition contributed to their overall view that the problem of resistance was positioned within the teacher, expected, and able to be predicted from previous actions and responses. Leader L12 echoed these beliefs when connecting a teacher’s disposition to resistance:

> And based on their outlook on life in general and it’s like the people with the positive outlook on life it’s not daunting for them. It’s just another thing they are involved in, and we’ve got a few whose outlook are not positive. It’s another thing to be negative about.

Leaders and facilitators hypothesised that teachers’ beliefs caused teachers to resist change, but few reported checking their assumptions about beliefs directly with teachers. Beliefs that were thought to create resistance included: union-based political beliefs, deep-seated social and racial beliefs, generalised non-belief in the PL and beliefs about teaching that conflicted
with the PL such as power sharing with students. Leader L11 attributed teacher beliefs to be the cause of some teachers’ lack of change, “often people have reasons, so there’s underlying reasons and beliefs and values that if you don’t get to those you’re not going to change anything”. Conflicting beliefs about the PL were also posited as reasons for teachers to make minimal or superficial changes only.

Half of the leaders and facilitators hypothesised that teachers resisted change to avoid extra work. They explained gaps in teachers’ knowledge and lack of confidence in knowledge to be the result of not putting in the required effort or preparation necessary for success. This aligned with their beliefs around provision of knowledge and the responsibility of teachers to acquire it. They also believed that teachers would rather resist or make excuses than expose their lack of knowledge to others. In this example leader L2 linked teacher resistance to lack of work:

*I know some of them are practicing things, but when it comes to them having to actually go and look for resources, readings and stuff like that, it’s automatically shut down mode. Now it’s just extra work. . . . ‘I’ve got so much on’, ‘I can’t do this’, and [the teacher] would always have an excuse.*

Another reason posited by leaders and facilitators referred to teachers preferring the status quo. They believed that teachers perceived the status quo as comfortable and therefore preferred their existing conditions to the proposed changes. Leader L13 explained teachers’ negative responses to a previous change as, “They just didn't want to change anything … because they were comfortable with the status quo”. Another explanation connected with teachers preferring the status quo suggested that teachers felt their current practices were adequate, and therefore did not want the discomfort of change. One facilitator hypothesised, “I think you can probably get them resisting for a number of reasons – those who already feel that their practices are quite adequate”. Implicit in teachers preferring the status quo and thinking their current practices were adequate was the view that change and new learning created discomfort that teachers did not want to experience.

The third common reason posited as a possible cause of teacher non-engagement in PL referred to a fear of failure and being exposed. Two-thirds of the leaders but not one of the facilitators considered this reason to explain teacher non-engagement. Implicit in this view was the assumption that teachers had something to hide from others, such as their lack of knowledge and skills. For example, Leader L13 explained non-engagement to be, “because
some of them do have poor practice and it is getting exposed. It’s a risk of exposure”.
Similarly leader L11 suggested, “if the teachers are worried then maybe they know that
they’ve got something to worry about”. Many leaders viewed visible signs of worry as
evidence of teachers knowing their practice was inadequate or to be “found wanting in some
way”.

In general, leaders and facilitators accepted that teachers responded emotionally at the start of
something new or unknown, and they viewed these emotional responses as indicative of
teachers’ initial resistance. Implicit in this view was that teachers changed their mind once
they became familiar with the new practices or saw the change in action. Leader L9
perceived teachers’ responses at the start of the PL event as negative but became more
positive once the task was underway. This leader described this response to change, “for a
lot of things, even like that research things, people start off squealing and yelling and
carrying on, and then they suddenly realise, oh, this is not so bad”. This belief justified
leaders and facilitators anticipating that their teachers would eventually make the planned
changes without action from them.

Leaders and facilitators believed teachers were resistant to change when they observed
teachers not doing expected practices or taking avoidance-related actions. They made
assumptions about teachers’ reasons for this apparent resistance or absence of action positing
that teachers themselves were the problem. Much of the language used by leaders and
facilitators to describe resistance reflected this negative view. This negative view was
reflected in the words they used to describe non-engagement, which often contained strong
negative connotations. These are illustrated in Figure 6.2 as word cloud created on Wordle
(http://www.wordle.net). A word cloud visually represents designated text, based on word
frequency. Word frequency is represented in the word cloud by size of the font.

This word cloud highlights the negative connotations of the words leaders and facilitators
used to describe teacher resistance during their interviews. The use of words like
“stonewall”, “argumentative”, “defensive” and “avoidance” also reflected the leaders’ and
facilitators’ emotional responses to teacher resistance.
Leaders and facilitators who held teacher-as-problem beliefs viewed teachers’ emotional responses and actions, illustrated in the *Wordle* (Feinberg, 2014) as evidence of teacher resistance. Specifically, their resistance frame led leaders and facilitators to make sense of teachers’ actions and responses in PL as resistant to change when they perceived teachers:

- responded with strong negative emotion;
- did not put in the required effort for successful knowledge building;
- did not demonstrate changes in their practice at appropriate times; or
- avoided events with exposure, such as being sick for observations.

In summary, leaders and facilitators made assumptions about teacher willingness and engagement in the PL based on: their observation of teachers’ emotional responses to events, their perceptions of teachers’ state of knowledge, their observation of teachers’ actions particularly around observations, and their apparent effort in learning new knowledge and skills. When leaders made sense of these cues with a resistance frame, they viewed these behaviours and visible emotion as a teacher problem, one that they as leaders, they believed they held little control over. The responsibility for action was positioned with the teacher rather than with them. One principal explained, “I want them to change intrinsically for themselves. And we're supposed to be professional reflective practitioners, that's what we are. We’re supposed to reflect all the time”. This principal believed like many of the *others* that teachers as professionals were responsible for making the necessary changes to engage in the PL thereby excusing leaders and facilitators from taking action. Ultimately resistance was equated with lack of teacher learning.
Framing Through a Risk Frame

In addition to considering teachers’ engagement in PL through their existing frames, leaders and facilitators were prompted to consider teachers’ engagement in the PL through a frame of perceptions of risk. They were also probed for their theories on risk, and the possible links between risk and willingness for teachers’ trying new practices in PL. This section reports on leaders’ and facilitators’ risk-framed responses to teachers’ engagement in the PL, highlighting similarities and differences with their resistance-framed responses.

Leaders and facilitators made sense of teachers’ emotional responses and actions in different ways through a risk frame. Using this frame, high perceptions of risk were perceived to explain low engagement in PL. The main differences between the resistance and risk frames were that a risk frame:

- positioned the problem of non-engagement beyond the teacher; and
- responsibility for teacher learning was shared between the teacher and leaders and or facilitators. Accordingly leaders and facilitators reframed their role in teacher learning to consider the context of learning including relationships, safety and support; and
- emotional responses were framed as understandable responses to perceptions of risk and not necessarily evidence of resistance.

Where a resistance frame focused engagement issues as a teacher problem, teachers’ emotional responses and actions viewed through a risk frame broadened leaders’ and facilitators’ responses beyond the teacher to consider other explanations for apparent low engagement in the PL. Most importantly, leaders and facilitators reframed engagement in new practices in the PL as a form of risk taking for teachers. When they did this, leaders’ and facilitators’ focus broadened to the learner and conditions for risk taking. As a result they connected learning to change and uncertainty, which they already accepted was uncomfortable, challenging and required their support.

Leaders and facilitators also began to reframe emotional responses in less negative ways when they connected risk with learning. Resistance was only one option to consider. One facilitator reflected:

*I think I would be a little bit more sensitive to the fact that some of the things I have thought of as resistance in the past are really just a bit of fear of exposing yourself or*
Emotional responses were less likely to be viewed as unwillingness and more likely to be framed as a reflection of teachers’ perceptions of risk. Negative emotional responses were considered understandable when connected to exposure and uncertainty in learning new practices. This next example is from a leader who had previously framed emotion as a teacher problem. During the final interview the leader acknowledged that being scared of doing something new was understandable and risky. Leader L10 reflected:

So if you’re scared of trying to do something new and sometimes it’s hard trying to do something new . . . now I understand it better, and when you’re trying to change, it’s risky, and they need to have that trust.

In this way, teachers’ emotional responses were more likely to be viewed as a response to learning rather than one of avoiding learning.

**Explanations for risk framed non-engagement**

Leaders and facilitators had two main explanations for why teachers formed perceptions of risk and did not appear to engage fully in the PL. These two common themes were identified from analysis and interpretation of interviews with leaders and facilitators when they were prompted to consider willingness and teacher engagement through a perception of risk frame. These reasons with frequency data included:

1. Relationships and context of risk taking (11/18)
2. Teachers themselves: (14/18)
   - need to get it right and concern for getting things wrong (10/18)
   - vulnerability connected to knowledge and skills (8/18)
   - personality and disposition (7/18)

Half the leaders and all facilitators considered relationships and the context of learning to affect teachers’ willingness to take risks and engage in PL. These leaders and facilitators believed quality relationships lowered perceptions of risks and supported teacher learning. One facilitator stated emphatically, “I do believe it’s all about the relationship; the better the relationship, I think the risk goes down immediately”. Implicit in this was the belief that high quality relationships lower risk and improve learning. This connection between engagement,
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learning and relationships was present in their teacher-learning frames but not apparent within a resistance frame.

The leaders’ and facilitators’ focus on relationships repositioned responsibility for learning from the teacher to include them. In doing so, these leaders and facilitators reflected on the context of teacher learning. They believed that a safe, supportive context and quality relationships lowered risk and increased engagement in PL. Leader L3 was explicit about what was required to support teachers as risk-takers, emphasising the responsibility of leaders in creating a climate of safety and support for learning. This leader’s level of explicitness and awareness was not common. Leader L3 explained:

\[
\text{You have to be aware that if you want people to take risks you have to be there to catch them when they fall because they will fall and you don’t want - if they hit the ground the next time they're not going to climb so high.}
\]

\[\text{Yeah, well as I said, I think that climate of supporting – you know, not being judgemental on what you're doing. Yeah, you've got to accept that people will stuff up if you want them to take risks. That's what risks are about isn't it?}
\]

\[\text{It's that supportive - whether it's implied or explicit, it doesn't really matter. You soon learn. You can be safe.}
\]

In these extracts, the leader highlighted that teachers’ future willingness to take risks depended on how leaders responded to teachers’ everyday risk-taking actions.

The second common reason posited by most of the leaders and facilitators for lack of teacher change and not taking risks in the PL related to the teachers themselves. The leaders and facilitators believed teachers needed to get things right, experienced feelings of vulnerability about their knowledge and skills, or had personality or dispositional reasons not to take risks in PL.

Over half the leaders and facilitators posited that worrying about the possibility of getting things wrong inhibited teacher risk taking. They considered this cause of uncertainty was an inherent aspect of risk in learning. A facilitator explained:

\[\text{Well most teachers I think want to get it right, so that feeling that if I do it it's got to be right and it's not always right. If you take a risk it's not always right. I guess probably that nature of wanting to be right.}\]
This facilitator noted the tension between risk taking, needing to get it right, and getting it wrong especially in exposure-related situations. Unlike the resistance frame where getting it wrong or being judged related to having something to hide, the risk frame led leaders and facilitators to consider other factors. They considered how they framed risk taking and learning, the meaning of mistakes and their role during observation of teacher practices in PL. The following three extracts, one from each school, showed that while leaders and facilitators realised the negative impact that feeling or being judged wrong had when trying new practices, they were less sure about how to reframe teachers’ beliefs so they were seen as supportive of teacher learning. Leaders L6, L7, and a facilitator respectively, described their dilemma about teachers perceiving learning as right and wrong and feeling judged:

There are concerns over the view that it's more for, you know, tick that you've done it right and cross that you've done it wrong... I think there's still some of that underlying as opposed to the fact that we're here to help and support and move you forward.

I think teachers here feel really judged and if you really judge people then they are going to go back to what they know works rather than take a risk and try and make a change, and if people get things wrong then that's okay. We say to kids, there's no learning without mistakes, but for teachers that's not an allowable thing, still. I'm talking about perception.

There certainly was – they were certainly feeling threatened I believe. I think an element of that may be dulled after the last observations when they realised that we weren’t coming in there to judge, and there was a collaborative co-constructed type situation - a learning experience rather than a judgmental good-bad.

These leaders and facilitators realised that teachers did not necessarily view them in a supportive role, which led them to reconsider their role in providing a non-judgmental context for PL. The realisation that a safe context supported learning and risk taking was missing through a resistance frame where leaders and facilitators viewed teachers as responsible for their own learning, irrespective of the context.

The majority of the leaders and facilitators who considered teachers’ concerns over getting things right or wrong as a possible explanation for teachers not taking risks in their learning, linked this to teachers feeling vulnerable, and/or not having confidence about their state of
knowledge. They no longer framed a lack of knowledge as a teacher problem. This more positive view of not knowing when learning something new forced them to consider teachers’ uncertainty, confidence and clarity in their knowledge and skills. In this excerpt, Leader L14 connected uncertainty, confidence, and clarity of knowing with concern for getting it wrong:

> And they realised that’s okay, they had a go and that, to trial things, and that sometimes they weren’t sure what was expected. So some people said that they didn’t know what it should look like or what was expected - I think it’s that real fear about getting it wrong. But now that it’s clearer, they know, they’ve got that confidence and they’re just using it naturally.

Some of these leaders and facilitators also connected teachers’ feelings of vulnerability about their state of knowledge as a possible reason for lack of risk taking and low engagement in PL. In this excerpt Leader L8 linked uncertainty in knowing and the discomfort this might cause a learner:

> But I just think it’s a wanting to always know that you know it, but then when you’re in a situation where you don’t know it and you’re learning, it’s hard to still be in control, it’s hard to still steer your own boat. You’ve got a few of the ideas, but then you don’t necessarily know it.

A smaller number of these leaders and facilitators made sense of teachers asking for help to indicate that teachers felt safe and were prepared to share their vulnerability with others. Where teachers had commonly been seen as resistant when not asking for help, a risk frame viewed not sharing vulnerability as reflecting a lack of relationship or safe context for teachers to ask for help. In this first example a facilitator made sense of the teacher asking for help as indicative of feeling comfortable or not vulnerable in their relationship, “[The teacher's] obviously feeling comfortable - well I presume [the teacher's] feeling comfortable enough to say, "Hey I don't know this up here". In the same way a leader in the same school commented on changes in teacher actions in staff meetings to result from teachers’ reduced perceptions of risk and vulnerability in their learning. Leader L11 connected this to the safety in the context:

> I think people are feeling good because people are starting to ask questions that they wouldn’t have normally asked in staff meetings, and people are saying, “Do we do it this way” or “Is that okay to do this” or “I’ve been doing it like this, what does
everybody think”, those kind of things. . . . Now, to me, that's a safe climate where people can say, “Well, I don’t think I did that quite right.”

In this next example, one of the leaders noticed qualitative differences in teachers asking and sharing help. This extract was part of the Leader L4’s final interview where the emergent risk perception process model was checked. The leader commented:

That’s a thing that I’ve noticed has grown enormously, and seeking from their own colleagues, which is really good. They're finding their own go-to people.

You’ll see them all the time in the staff room. “Look I’m not quite sure how I’m going, have you got some ideas how you could help me?” So I see them tied together. Yeah, and this seeking help and sharing vulnerability, I have three people ... who do everything to prevent any of us seeing this.

This leader clearly positioned asking for help as a positive teacher response in comparison to those that were not asking.

The third most frequent explanation connected to the teachers themselves related to personality and disposition. In a similar way that teacher resistance was viewed as inherent in the person, some leaders and facilitators also viewed risk taking in this way. In the following example Leader L14 referred to teachers’ dispositions to explain diversity in willingness to take risks:

I guess it was thinking about, we’ve just got real extremes. I guess in any school you’ve got some people who are really extreme, everything’s a risk, every time you open your mouth everything’s a risk, and there’s other people who just are really cruisy and they don’t seem to feel that there’s risk, or they might say that, but in actual fact they do. So it’s also how people might initially say they are - or have said - they might be quite different.

This view was indicative of other leaders and facilitators and reinforced the commonly held concept that we respond to situations in predictable and fixed ways.

The language used to describe risk-related non-engagement was notable different to the language used through a resistance frame. These risk-framed words are represented visually as a Wordle (http://www.wordle.net) word cloud in Figure 6.3 below to highlight the differences to the words displayed in Figure 6.2 for resistance.
Risk-framed words typically related to feelings, relationships, context and right or wrong. They did not have the strong negative connotations of words connected with a resistance frame.

In summary, leaders and facilitators started to consider their own impact, and that of others, on teacher learning in PL through a risk frame. When they did, they repositioned responsibility for non-engagement in learning from the teacher to include leaders and or facilitators. As a result of this repositioning and reframing learning as risk-taking, leaders and facilitators looked for solutions beyond the teacher. Consideration of relationships, the context for teacher learning and how they framed teacher learning, gained importance as a possible way to increase engagement. Support and safety for the teacher as learner became a consideration. This was not present with a resistance frame.

**Frame ambiguity**

Leader and facilitator transcripts were coded as risk-framed when their responses connected with uncertainty in some way. Uncertainty for this research was about not knowing, not being sure or not having sufficient confidence about something in the future. Leaders and facilitators did not switch completely from a resistance to risk frame when prompted in their interview to consider risk in professional learning. This meant that some of them made only superficial changes in their attempts at reframing actions and emotional responses from their existing resistance frames to an alternative risk frame. They used risk terminology but conceptualised risk as real danger, rather than uncertainty as it is framed in this research. I have labelled this frame ambiguity. The leaders and facilitators who responded with frame
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Ambiguity were more likely to view risk in absolute terms more in line with resistance than reflective of uncertainty inherent in risk. For example the following leader used the word risk but perceived little uncertainty in the outcome of the event for the teacher, or that the teacher may feel uncertainty towards learning. This view was more aligned with resistance than perceived risk. Leader L13 shared, “Some people don’t want to engage in professional development because it highlights areas that they need to further develop and they don’t like that. It’s a risk of exposure”. This leader’s focus remained on the teacher as a problem.

Changes in thinking about teachers’ perceptions of risk

Leaders and facilitators were asked to reflect on changes in their thinking about PL and risk during their final interviews. Many leaders and facilitators reported making changes in response to greater talk about the constructs of risk. Collectively, they reported they were more likely to communicate about risk and change to their teachers. This included framing learning as risk taking, and considering teachers’ emotions and feelings when they tried new things.

Leaders and facilitators were unanimous that talking about risk did not create it. They perceived talking about risk as an important part of framing learning in PL for change. The next two excerpts highlighted the range of benefits they perceived from talking about risk and change. In this first extract, a facilitator viewed talking about risk as a useful tool to frame courage, a necessary requisite for risk taking:

I don’t know that you’re creating perceptions of risk by talking about it, but I think that people . . . that it brings it forward in their minds so they think about it more. And I actually don’t see that as being a bad thing. I see it as being a useful thing in that people can then bring it up when they’re talking with you and they can also discuss it and can perhaps learn themselves about what they are putting aside because it’s too risky, and what they can do about being braver, what the consequences might be.

On the other hand, Leader L4 spoke of the value of talking about risk taking and learning from the outcomes:

[You need] time to have conversations that you can draw and tease things out, and also conversations where you can say to people, take the risk and if it doesn’t work, you analyse as a teacher inquiry, you say why didn’t it work and you go onto the next
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step, because that is applied in the whole of successful science or anywhere. The big thing is about trying something out.

Both the leader and the facilitator focused on teacher learning as risk taking. One emphasised the importance of understanding the learner and the courage needed to take risks, whereas the second emphasised learning as ongoing risk taking. Neither spoke explicitly of their role in supporting risk taking.

There was little indication that leaders routinely considered their role in mitigating avoidable risk. Organisational issues in all three schools created additional uncertainty for teachers, particularly at the introduction of the PL. Communicating PL details to teachers by school leaders in a timely manner was the main source of organisational uncertainty yet only four leaders reflected that organisational issues had created unnecessary uncertainty for teachers in the PL. This source of uncertainty once noticed was usually mitigated for ongoing events. A principal reflected on the need for certainty in organisational details:

And for me it was the organisation’s really important. We need to make sure that the schedule’s out and then the release is so people have got plenty of time to soak it in and absorb it and they’re ready - rather than just hand it in the week before and everyone’s running around like headless chooks.

This principal understood that teacher’s future willingness to take risks depended on leaders’ everyday responses to teachers’ risk taking actions. The principal had repositioned responsibility for teacher engagement to include everyone. In the final interview, this principal reflected on teachers’ perceptions of risk in the PL:

I think it’s really important to acknowledge it [teachers’ perceptions of risk.] and to think and have that in your planning and that how we approach them as leaders, middle leaders, whatever you are, that we need to be aware of it because it has impacts. And the way that we approach things, the way that we plan things can either be positive or negative in terms of the way we get teachers to implement it. So it’s worthwhile having foresight and thinking about it before you launch into something

Summary of Finding Six

Overall, leaders and facilitators framed risk and resistance in PL in different ways. The use of a risk frame reduced the negative connotations associated with teacher resistance to change with teachers’ emotional responses more likely to be framed as an understandable response to
risk taking. Leaders and facilitators repositioned non-engagement in PL beyond the teacher to include themselves and others. This shared the responsibility for teacher learning and brought factors such as relationships, feeling safe and supported to their awareness even if not enacted.

Leaders and facilitators had begun to make sense of teachers’ engagement in change through a risk frame. They had started to gain an awareness of the possible risk taking required of the teacher as learner in professional learning. Their concepts of risk for teachers in professional learning were developing towards those held by the teachers themselves.
Chapter 7: Discussion

This thesis explored 21 teachers’ perceptions of risk in professional learning in three New Zealand schools and leaders’ and facilitators’ sensemaking of their responses. It took place during the first year of an externally provided school-based professional learning (PL) contract. I expected to uncover individual ways of making sense of the inevitable uncertainty that accompanies professional learning for change. Instead, I found similar patterns and themes in the way teachers made sense of uncertainty in their PL contexts as perceptions of risk.

I argue that the findings of this thesis advance our understanding of this relatively under-researched concept by providing insight into the sources of uncertainty that teachers made sense of as perceptions of risk in their professional learning. In addition, the findings reported in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, when joined together form an explicit risk perception process model. This model conceptualises perceptions of risk in an accessible form that may be used by educators as a compass for navigating teachers’ perceptions of risk in their implementation of change. Furthermore, the model provides a basis for future research.

Teachers responded emotionally and took actions based on their perceptions of risk and associated feelings of vulnerability in their PL situations. These emotional responses and actions impacted on teachers’ learning. The relative balance of emotion and cognition seemingly played a key role in the actions the teachers took. The model identifies the types of teacher responses and actions, thus illustrating how perceptions of risk impact on learning.

Finally, I contend that reframing teachers’ emotional responses and actions through a perceptions of risk lens challenges entrenched beliefs about teachers’ resistance to change, and in so doing forces educators to reframe existing teacher-as-problem beliefs to beliefs that focus on supporting teachers as they take risks in their learning. Moreover, the current framing of emotional responses by leaders in schools ignores the influence that strong emotions have on teacher professional learning. As a result, these leader beliefs constrain learning for teachers.

I now turn the discussion to focus on:

1. The proposed risk perception process model
2. The role of perceptions of risk in learning
3. Implications for practice and policy
I finish with suggestions as to how the insights gained from this case study research can be used in future research to deepen our understanding of perceptions of risk in learning (Merriam, 1998).

**Mapping the Process: The Proposed Risk Perception Process Model**

It was evident in the findings of this research that, although some teachers did not experience perceptions of risk in the PL, the majority of teachers made sense of the uncertainty as perceptions of risk and feelings of vulnerability towards future PL events. It was also evident that there were strong similarities in the sources of uncertainty perceived by those teachers who did perceive risks and in the types of responses and actions they took. As a result, perceptions of risk and feelings of vulnerability impacted on teachers’ learning.

The proposed risk perception process model is a multifaceted representation of risk perceptions, drawing on psychological, socio-cultural and institutional factors (Slovic, 2010; Trimpop, 1994). It was constructed by connecting the findings of this research to my revised conceptual framework. The model links four key components identified in the findings: uncertainty, vulnerability, emotional responses, and actions by way of a recurrent cycle of sensemaking ultimately impacting on teacher learning. This ongoing sensemaking process connects existing and past experiences to future experiences. Each new experience, or in this case PL event, is a new “occasion for sensemaking” (Weick, 1995, p. 987). Additionally, the impact of others acts on this process, mediating teachers’ perceptions of risk in the PL.

Risk in this research was conceived as a mental construction, not an objective state of the world (Aven & Renn, 2009; Sjoberg, 2000; Zinn, 2008). Therefore, risk is not the PL event *per se*, but the perceived uncertainty connected to these future events. The initial conceptual framework discussed at the end of Chapter 2 was based on risk as “uncertainty about and severity of the events and consequences (or outcomes) of an activity with respect to something that humans value” (Aven & Renn, 2009, p. 6). Four key premises specific to utilising this risk lens underpin the conceptual framework and the proposed model presented here. They are:

a) uncertainty is the basis of perceptions of risk;

b) assessment and evaluation of uncertainty, and severity occur simultaneously;

c) perceptions of risk focus on a future event and its consequences; and

d) perceptions of risk relate to the person in that context.
The model is located within a school context to draw attention to factors that influence teachers’ perceptions of risk in PL. This focus on the school context emphasises the factors that educators can influence. Nonetheless, I acknowledge the multiple layers of contextual factors such as the wider socio-cultural influence ever present in the background.

Professional learning for change interrupts existing patterns of behaviour, cognition and emotion for those involved. New uncertainty and ambiguity emerge in this context, with some teachers experiencing perceptions of risk and associated feelings of vulnerability. This is particularly evident at the start where new uncertainties and knowledge gaps are more apparent. Teachers’ perceptions of risk inform their subsequent actions, which in turn impact on future perceptions of risk, ensuring an ever-changing context for all participants.

I present the model in two parts. Part I, illustrated in Figure 7.1, focuses on the individual or self, highlighting the key components of the risk perception process for the teacher. Part II, the complete model (Figure 7.2), overlays the cyclic sensemaking processes and mediating impact of others onto the risk perception process. Although illustrating this as a linear process, in reality it is more complex. The individual teacher’s sensemaking is dynamic, changeable and affected by the socio-cultural and contextual factors in the school and wider environment. Additionally, these ongoing processes subsequently affect the context.

![Figure 7.1. Part I: The key components of the individual risk perception process](image-url)
In essence, the model proposes that teachers make risk judgments about a future event based on their past experiences as well as their assessment and evaluation of different sources of uncertainty in the current context. This accumulation of perceived uncertainty is associated with variable feelings of vulnerability, which together form perceptions of risk towards the future event. Teachers respond and take actions based on their judgment of the perceived risk. Although not explicit on the model, the process impacts on teachers’ learning, either positively or negatively.

The process is represented as highly individual with teachers making different sense of their professional learning within seemingly similar conditions. Some teachers reported high levels of uncertainty and vulnerability linked to multiple sources of uncertainty. Their uncertainty appeared to accumulate into a bucket-like vessel, with uncertainty connected to knowledge and relationships filling the bucket more quickly. In contrast, a few teachers in the study reported no uncertainty or perceptions of risk. The purple arrow at the base of the model in Fig.7.1 represents these teachers.

Three sequential categories of uncertainty are highlighted in the model: existing uncertainty, uncertainty connected to a future event, and uncertainty connected to the possible consequences of that event. The seven different sources of uncertainty: existing uncertainty, organisation of the PL, relationships, state of knowledge, sources of evidence, outcomes for self and outcomes for others, relate to each of these three categories. In the first instance, the teacher uses existing uncertainty to make sense of and frame their interrupted learning environment (Weick, 1995). The teacher notices things that are new or different and makes sense of them using existing frameworks, experiences and knowledge (Coburn, 2001, 2006; Spillane et al., 2002; Weick, 1995).

The different sources of uncertainty influenced perceptions of risk in diverse ways. Some sources of uncertainty such as those connected to organisational factors reduced over time, suggesting a developmental approach to change (Hall & Hord, 2015). Yet in contrast, other perceived sources of uncertainty changed dynamically depending on the individual in that particular time and context. Additionally, some sources had greater effects than others. Uncertainty connected to relationships and knowledge were the most powerful in driving up perceptions of risk. Together, they created high levels of risk and feelings of vulnerability that challenged teachers’ personal and professional identities.
Teachers’ feelings of vulnerability resulted from their individual assessment and evaluation of the perceived risks. These feelings of vulnerability are illustrated via a shifting mechanism to underscore their highly responsive and dynamic nature. Teachers’ feelings of vulnerability were responsive to the amount of perceived uncertainty, yet at other times, teachers’ feelings of vulnerability functioned as a gauge of perceived severity of consequences for that teacher. Low uncertainty did not necessarily mean low risk as severity of consequences affected their risk judgments (Aven & Renn, 2009).

Researchers have linked the concept of loss to risk perception (Le Fevre, 2014; Ponticell, 2003). Loss of something of value is implicit in the model connected to outcomes for self and others, for example, the additional time required for new learning and perceived loss of learning time for students when new practices were introduced. Loss for teachers was also connected to feelings of vulnerability that occurred when teachers perceived the possibility of failure and the feeling that others questioned their competency as teachers. Challenge to teachers’ personal and professional identities was connected to loss of face or embarrassment (Scheff, 2000) and loss of social recognition (Kelchtermans, 1996). The potential for loss of feeling like a “good teacher” underpinned the notion of vulnerability for the majority of teachers.

Teachers’ perceptions of risk and feelings of vulnerability impacted on their emotional responses and the range of actions taken, represented by the forward pointing arrows on the model. The risk perception process is immersed in emotion. On the one hand, teachers experienced emotion as a result of their perceptions of risk, with this emotion impacting on their actions, prior to and during the event. On the other hand, this emotion quickly became part of existing uncertainty and thus informed future perceptions of risk and actions. Additionally, there were similarities and differences in teachers’ actions and emotional responses depending on the level of perceived risk. For example, the level of risk explained some teachers’ reluctance to seek help and how they chose with whom they shared their vulnerability. Although not shown on the model, these actions ultimately impacted on their learning. Aven and Krohn (2014) suggest that risk reduction is about reducing uncertainties and strengthening knowledge, whereas Kelchtermans (1996) discusses teachers’ actions as regaining lost social recognition and restoring workplace conditions.

Three additional components complete the proposed risk perception process model (Figure 7.2). First, the completed model includes the event that the perceptions of risk are focused on. This research confirmed the findings reported by Le Fevre (2014) that exposure or
deprivatisation of teacher practice was associated with high perceptions of risk. The type of event adds further complexity to understanding perceptions of risk, as not only is it possible for teachers to perceive different risks from the same event, the event in turn alters the level of perceived uncertainty for teachers.

Perceptions of risk and risk-taking actions (response to risk perceptions) are located in the model within a temporal sequence relative to the event. Teachers formed perceptions of risk prior to responding emotionally or taking action. This highlights the antecedent nature of perceptions of risk and differentiates them from the resultant risk-taking actions. It also highlights the processes and actions that the teacher takes prior to the PL event, actions that were not reported on by leaders and facilitators.

Second, the impact of the actions of others (principals, school leaders and facilitators) on teachers’ perceptions of risk introduces a socio-cultural perspective to the model (Jackson et al., 2006; Taylor-Gooby & Zinn, 2006; Wildavsky & Dake, 1990). The actions of others are conceptualised as mediating teachers’ perceptions of risk. Supportive relationships (being known as a learner, empathy and respect, feeling supported, and feeling trust) and positive ways of building knowledge were highlighted by the teachers in this research as ways others could decrease risk for teachers in professional learning. In contrast, teachers’ perceptions of risk increased when these conditions were not present or when the actions of others challenged teachers’ sense of competence, thereby threatening their personal and professional identities.

Third, sensemaking theory binds the risk perception process together and explains the individual nature of teachers’ perceptions of risk. Weick (2010) states that sensemaking occurs when the interrupted environment creates trouble, that is, disorder, confusion and insecurity. Consistent with this, the teacher as sense maker recognises trouble in his or her PL context and undertakes to make sense of it. Teachers start the process by bringing their existing uncertainty or sense from past experiences to make sense of the new uncertainty they are experiencing in their changing context, and then take actions. After the event, the teachers retrospectively make sense of that event, which cycles back to inform future sensemaking. Therefore, at all stages of the process, teacher sensemaking is individual and may already be different from the views held by other teachers, facilitators and leaders.
Figure 7.2. Part II: The proposed risk perception process
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The seven properties proposed by sensemaking theory: social, identity, retrospect, cues, ongoing events, plausibility and enactment (Weick, 1995, 2005, 2009, 2010) represent what happens as the teachers make sense of the uncertainty and ambiguity in their changing PL environment (Weick, 2010). These properties are briefly illustrated in order to connect the individual teacher’s sensemaking to the posited risk perception process. The model stresses the social and relational nature of perceptions of risk, especially by including the impact of others. Exposure of teacher practice to others during an event commonly increased perceptions of risk for teachers. Next, the identity of the teacher as risk perceiver is readily noted as teachers grappled with threats to their professional identity, typically from those who held more power.

Teachers retrospectively justified or made sense of their actions within pre-existing frames, past experiences and existing knowledge (Coburn, 2001, 2006; Spillane et al., 2002; Weick, 1995). Although teachers’ perceptions of risk were focused on future events they were based on their sensemaking to date. They made sense of their vulnerability by retrospectively attributing these feelings to sources of uncertainty in the context. Teachers’ ongoing sensemaking guided their future actions (Weick, 2010).

Teachers noticed and connected some cues yet ignored others to made sense of the uncertainty in the PL. This was particularly evident when teachers experienced strong negative emotions. At these more emotional times, the teachers focused their attention inwards (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010) away from learning. This constrained selection of cues from the ongoing events was more noticeable at times of greater uncertainty within the sensemaking cycle.

Teachers made plausible sense of the cues they noticed and took action. Their sensemaking did not necessarily match those of others, thus creating opportunities for their actions to be contested by others. This occurred in some feedback meetings where a leader or facilitator’s version of events differed from those of the teacher who was observed. Teachers enacted or took actions based on their perceptions of risk to date. These actions impacted on their learning in positive and negative ways.

Although not explored by the researcher, sensemaking theory may also explain the narratives of teachers who did not report perceptions of risk. These teachers either did not feel trouble in their world, possibly because the level of uncertainty was acceptable, or they were unaware of any uncertainty. Alternatively, the expected practices may not have been
unfamiliar due to greater prior knowledge (Spillane, et al., 2002), thus the PL may not have held the level of risk felt by others. Further exploration of teachers’ notions of risk taking, safety and learning, rather than uncertainty, may access the narratives of the no-risk teachers.

**Highlighting the Complexity: The Role of Perceptions of Risk in Learning**

In this section, I discuss the findings related to the impact of perceptions of risk on learning by focusing on emotion, the emotion-cognition balance, and their impact on learning. Then, I outline the insights gained on the concept of vulnerability and locate these within the current literature. I finish this section by discussing wider issues connected with common framings of emotion and vulnerability. For the discussion that follows, emotion is used as a general term, inclusive of affect, feelings and mood.

An important finding of this research was that teachers’ perceptions of risk impacted on their learning. This impact on learning was negative for those teachers who held high perceptions of risk and experienced more intense feelings of vulnerability. As a result, their personal and professional identities were challenged, escalating their perceptions of risk and reducing learning further.

Emotion and cognition are posited to contribute to the risk perception process (Kahneman, 2011; Slovic, 2010). In this research they are conceptualised as inseparable, “tightly interwoven” (J. A. Schmidt & Datnow, 2005, p. 952) and working dynamically together as a “dance of affect and reason” (Finucane et al., 2003, p. 327). The findings strongly support this interactional nature of emotion and cognition in perceptions of risk. In many ways the proposed model is situated in a sea of emotion, both seen and masked (Cahour, 2013).

Emotion entered teachers’ sensemaking processes seemingly at every point, particularly for those teachers who perceived risk in their PL. Negative emotions, as expressions of teachers’ perceptions of risk and feelings of vulnerability, appeared to take control.

Teachers’ uncertainty appeared to accumulate into a central bucket-like vessel, with the level ebbing and flowing in response to each new experience and the relative impact of the different sources of perceived uncertainty. Uncertainty connected to teachers’ states of knowledge and skills, quality of their relationships with the others (leaders and facilitators) and uncertainty connected to how the consequences may affect them (associated feelings of vulnerability) filled their buckets more quickly, thereby increasing their overall perceptions of risk. In addition, teachers were more aware of possible negative scenarios of a PL event than positive ones, escalating teachers’ overall perceptions of risk towards the next event.
These escalating perceptions of risk drove their emotional responses and actions, thus intentionally or not impacting on their learning. This impact on learning was determined to a greater extent by the shifting balance of emotion over cognition at the time. Negative emotion influenced teachers’ preparation for an event as evidenced by teachers over-preparing and seeking reassurance. When negative emotion dominated cognition during an event, this emotion biased what the teacher noticed, interfered with their decisions and ability to focus on learning, and distracted their attention inwards, increasing their feelings of vulnerability. Negative emotion also affected how teachers framed the outcome of the event, thus influencing subsequent cycles of risk assessment and evaluation. In this way, negative emotion, initially in response to perceived risk, cycled around to make learning more difficult, with teachers’ negative emotion a response to learning rather than one of avoiding learning (Antonacopoulou & Gabriel, 2001). Collectively and separately, teachers’ responses constrained their ability to make the most of the learning opportunities.

Teachers’ emotions were dynamic, occurring instantaneously in response to embarrassment, perceived failure and confusion. These strong negative emotional responses did not dissipate quickly, nor were they forgotten, with successive negatively framed events impacting further on teachers’ learning. At these times, emotion affected teacher actions and cognition more than at other times, with teachers’ professional and personal identity likely to be challenged (Cross & Hong, 2014; Hargreaves, 1998a, 1998b; Kelchtermans, 1996, 2006, 2009; Kelchtermans et al., 2009; Lasky, 2005; Nias, 2005; J. A. Schmidt & Datnow, 2005; M. Schmidt, 2000; Schutz & Zembylas, 2009a; van Veen et al., 2005; van Veen & Sleeegers, 2006, 2009; Zembylas, 2005b). Teacher emotion, in response to perceived risk, was strongly linked to their identities.

In contrast, perceived success after an event led to positive emotions such as pride and relief. These positive emotions reduced teachers’ perceptions of risk for future events and fostered an ongoing willingness to try things. These positive outcomes for learning were common.

Teachers took actions based on their perceptions of risk to prevent worst-case scenarios happening. These risk minimising actions impacted on their learning. For example, actions such as preparing special lessons for observations decreased uncertainty for the teacher, thereby increasing the likelihood of a successful event. In contrast, actions such as not seeking expert help potentially increased or maintained their existing uncertainty and perceived risk, thus limiting learning. If teachers who had high perceptions of risk achieved a successful outcome, their feelings of vulnerability and uncertainty subsequently reduced, but
did not disappear completely, as there were no guarantees that they would be successful in each new event.

Teachers’ actions could be interpreted as motivated by a need to protect themselves from possible feelings of vulnerability as evidenced by the teachers who took measured risks or planned special lessons when being observed. Alternatively, their actions may have been motivated by a need to appear competent and therefore invulnerable to others. In addition to lowering perceptions of risk and vulnerability, the teachers may have inadvertently constrained their learning by delivering safer options rather than more risky alternatives with greater potential for learning. Although this research showed that teachers’ learning was negatively affected for those teachers who experienced high perceptions of risk, it did not explore and therefore cannot confirm that the absence of perceptions of risk or low perceived uncertainty would equate with high levels of learning.

The actions of others mediated teachers’ perceptions of risk, thus impacting on teachers’ learning. Uncertainty connected to relationships appeared to impact significantly on teachers’ learning. Supportive relationships were essential for teachers to take risks when they were not confident or certain in their state of knowledge. Without this relationship, teacher actions were for the most part carried out in ways that kept their feelings of vulnerability hidden from others. Supportive relationships were strongly based on emotion and included the notions of being known as a learner, being shown empathy and respect, feeling supported and feeling trust.

The notion of trust linked closely with concepts of vulnerability, uncertainty and risk for the teachers. High levels of uncertainty and perceived risk required high levels of trust. The teachers were less willing to be vulnerable with their leaders and facilitator without feelings of trust, preferring to work with those they trusted. They described trust as others responding respectfully, maintaining confidentiality and being mindful of the effect of their actions on them, as they took risks in their learning. The presence of trust acted to protect the teacher from emotional harm and reduce the likelihood of increasing the perceptions of risk for the recipient. Trust appeared to moderate feelings of uncertainty and vulnerability (Bryk & Schneider, 2002), whereas an absence of trust escalated perceptions of risk. These findings confirm trust as a pre-condition of risk taking (Reio & Lasky, 2007).

Emotions are complex “multifaceted phenomena” (Scherer, as cited in Pekrun, 2011, p. 24) that add complexity to untangling their effect on cognition. Teachers’ accounts of their
perceptions of risk suggest the need to look holistically at the relative balance of emotion on cognition and learning, rather than attempt to disentangle their individual functioning. This balance is for the most part unnoticed, but at times of uncertainty, the relative balance swung towards an increase in negative emotion, thus affecting the influence of emotion over cognition on action and learning.

This research gained insight into the relationship between emotion and cognition from the small number of teachers who, as a result of their feelings of vulnerability and risk, experienced strong emotions that interfered with their learning. They spoke of the need to consciously separate their emotion from cognition in order to restore the balance and be able to learn during the PL. Additionally, the concept of risk provided a way of framing teachers’ uncertainty, lack of confidence and feelings of vulnerability in ways that did not infer weakness or negativity. These teachers did not consider themselves victims, nor did they want to be considered victims by others (Kelchtermans, 1996). They were motivated by their moral integrity (Kelchtermans, 1996) to be successful in the PL for their students, in spite of experiencing a downward spiral connected with their own negative learning experiences.

This willingness to take risks for their students was espoused by the majority of the teachers in this research and confirms Howard’s (2009, 2011) finding that teachers consider benefits to student learning in their risk judgments.

However, the finding that the majority of teachers reported feelings of vulnerability connected to perceptions of risk in their current or prior PL experiences, shifts the concept of vulnerability firmly into the spotlight. Accordingly, I outline what was learned about teacher vulnerability in the current research, and position these findings alongside the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

**Vulnerability as an experience and a contextual condition**

Vulnerability can be considered an experience and a condition or situation that one is placed within. Ultimately, it involves both the experience and the condition in a complex relationship of mutual influence. This research on understanding teachers’ perceptions of risk in PL confirms existing research on vulnerability as an experience and as a condition in teaching and teachers’ work (Bullough, 2005; Kelchtermans, 1996, 2009, 2011; Kelchtermans et al., 2009). The findings extend our current understandings of vulnerability by alerting educators to specific contextual conditions that impact on teachers’ experiences of vulnerability as they encounter uncertainty and perceived risk during their participation in
professional learning. These experiences of vulnerability were highly responsive to the immediate context emphasising a dynamic characteristic in addition to the enduring experience discussed by Kelchtermans (2011).

The experience of vulnerability when connected to perceived risk is primarily an inward looking process with feelings (expressed as emotions) and thoughts (cognition) that occur when uncertainty towards an anticipated event or its consequences challenges one’s identity or emotional security (Le Fevre, 2014). It relates to teachers’ perceptions of themselves (personal and professional) when they find themselves in situations where they perceive risks in failing, when others contest their credibility and reputation as successful teachers, and/or when they perceive they may already have failed. This aligns with Kelchtermans’ (1996) definition where he described vulnerability as “feeling that one’s professional identity and moral integrity, as part of being ‘a proper teacher’, are questioned and that valued workplace conditions are thereby threatened or lost” (p. 319). Implicit in both these descriptions is vulnerability as a distinct concept involving a process of re-evaluation or sensemaking of one’s professional and personal identities. This re-evaluation of identity was absent for the three teachers who reported no or minimal risk as if their experience in this professional learning did not impact on their identity as a teacher. Further research is needed to explore this hypothesis.

Vulnerability can also be considered a condition of the context or situation. The risk lens used in this research identified possible antecedent sources of uncertainty in the PL context that informed teachers’ perceptions of risk and their associated feelings of vulnerability. (See the earlier discussion on sources of uncertainty in the risk perception process model and Figures 1 and 2). This research framed teachers’ professional learning context as a special case of teachers’ working conditions, focusing on the additional uncertainty in this specific context, yet found that existing uncertainty and the “structural characteristic of the (teaching) profession” (Kelchtermans, 2009, p. 266) unavoidably influenced, added to and at times intensified teachers’ experiences of vulnerability. Although not the focus of this research, there was no doubt that power relations and issues of control existed for teachers in their learning context as well. This was more noticeable at times when their practice was exposed to others, concurring with the political basis of structural vulnerability inherent in teachers’ working conditions (Kelchtermans 1996, 2009, 2011). Lack of control such as during the collection of student voice, increased risk and vulnerability whereas perceived control for example, during the process of video recording, decreased perceived risk. Ultimately,
teachers had some but not complete control over the risks they took, evidenced by the actions they selected when preparing for observation lessons, and from whom they sought help. These findings are also supported by risk studies that link controllability to lower perceived risk (Taylor-Gooby & Zinn, 2006).

Teachers’ experiences of vulnerability manifested differently for different participants and changed, often quickly, in response to their context and the people in that context (Kelchtermans, 1996). Sources of uncertainty in their PL contexts connected to perceptions of risk and feelings of vulnerability, especially around knowledge and relationships, were intensified by existing conditions in the school culture and teaching generally. Trust acted to protect teachers from emotional harm and lowered feelings of vulnerability whereas its absence escalated both perceived risk and vulnerability.

Educators can apply these findings on teachers’ vulnerability to support teacher engagement in PL. However, these actions do not address the underlying negative framing of emotion and vulnerability that currently exists in schools and society.

Reframing emotion and vulnerability

I now broaden my discussion to the framing of emotion and vulnerability in schools and the wider societal context. I contend that our current framing of these concepts constrains professional learning for teachers, especially for those teachers who experience strong emotion and feelings of vulnerability.

Emotion is posited to be inherent in teaching, especially in educational change (Hargreaves, 2005; J. A. Schmidt & Datnow, 2005). There was no doubt in this research that emotion and feelings of vulnerability were inherent in teachers’ perceptions of risk before, during and after each PL event, especially if teachers’ practices were exposed to others. The impact of these feelings of vulnerability and emotion on teachers, leaders and facilitators was inescapable and pervasive, informing their sensemaking of future events.

By the end of the study it became clear that the current everyday framing of visible negative emotion and vulnerability were problematic for teachers. Both vulnerability and emotion are commonly viewed as weaknesses and something to hide from others, whereas emotional control (Zembylas, 2005b) and invulnerability are seen positively as something to aspire to (Gilson, 2014). The lure of invulnerability as showing competence and independence is pervasive and strong, encouraging actions that avoid failure, discomfort and self-doubt.
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(Bullough, 2005). Writing from a critical feminist perspective, Gilson (2011, 2014) promotes reframing vulnerability from “a de facto negative state” (2011, p. 10) with connotations of weakness and openness to harm, to define vulnerability as “openness and affectivity and such openness entails the inability to predict, control, and fully know that to which we are open and how it will affect us” (2011, p. 127). In this reframing, she not only recognises the future as inherently uncertain and in contrast to the common negative connotation and potential for harm, but also highlights the positive valence of vulnerability as enabling one’s potential. This reinforces the ambivalent potential of vulnerability (Bullough, 2005; Kelchtermans, 2011; Lasky, 2005).

Scholars beyond education remind us of the universality of vulnerability as an “unavoidable feature of human existence” (Gilson, 2011, p. 309), and the “core of all emotions and feelings” (Brown, 2013, p. 34), rather than as a condition of the weak to be avoided. Therefore we are all vulnerable, a condition Gilson calls, “ontological vulnerability” (2014, p. 37). Similarly Goffman in 1959, highlighted this unavoidable and uncomfortable aspect of our emotional vulnerability: “There is no interaction in which participants do not take an appreciable chance of being slightly embarrassed or a slight chance of being deeply humiliated” (as cited in Scheff, 2014, p. 111). Yet, we prefer to strive for invulnerability, consigning our feelings of vulnerability from sight and sound, and for the most part, we are unwilling to discuss our embarrassment, shame or fear.

Many of the teachers and leaders in this research strove to appear invulnerable and where possible removed or kept their feelings of vulnerability hidden from the PL context. This inefficacious vulnerability (Lasky, 2005) meant teachers hid their vulnerability from others by taking safe risks in their learning, over-preparing lessons, and not asking for help in the absence of trusting relationships. Similarly, leaders took actions to appear professional (Beatty, 2000, 2011) such as keeping ahead with readings to maintain their credibility and competence, and avoided showing their vulnerability to their teachers. Some leaders recalled their own feelings of vulnerability, yet in the PL focused on cognitive factors in their observations of teachers’ practices. They were either uncomfortable addressing another’s emotions and vulnerability or did not recognise these feelings in relation to teachers’ practices. If we continue to frame vulnerability as a weakness, and therefore something to avoid, be ashamed of and make assumptions about, we label others (and ourselves) as less competent and unintentionally encourage avoidance and unwillingness to take risks.
The framing of vulnerability as a weakness has led to viewing the person as vulnerable, thereby assigning or accepting that responsibility for change rests with that person. This belief was reinforced each time leaders and teachers successfully overcame their own vulnerability on their way to success. Gilson (2014) claims this reflects a wider societal worldview of individualism that promotes “privatization” or individual responsibility for action. Individual responsibility was implicit in leaders’ notions of professionalism and only occasionally was vulnerability seen by them to result from the situation or context, which illustrates that they may not consider themselves as contributing to the vulnerability of others.

This changed for some leaders when they were prompted to view teachers’ responses and action through a risk frame. Talking about risk forced leaders to consider the uncertainty in the context and consider other alternatives, including their own influence on teachers’ emotional responses, rather than simplify them as indicators of avoidance or resistance. There was evidence to suggest that leaders began to consider: sharing responsibility for teacher learning; the influence of relationships, safety and support; and that emotional responses were understandable responses to perceptions of risk, and not necessarily evidence of expected resistance.

Framing vulnerability as a weakness and aspiring to invulnerability runs counter to risk taking and learning. Gilson and others encourage us to reframe vulnerability as positive and “emphasise the positive dimensions of vulnerability – that is, positive dimensions of our ability to affect one another and be affected” (Gilson, 2014, p. 121). My contention, based on the findings of this research, is that risk taking requires shared responsibility between the teacher as risk taker, and leaders as supporters. The teacher may still experience feelings of vulnerability when taking a risk or “leap of faith”, but would feel encouraged to do so knowing that leaders were there to support. The teachers in this research were clear about the type of supportive context necessary for them to share their vulnerability and take the risks necessary to learn.

Underpinning shared responsibility for learning is a raised awareness and recognition that vulnerability is inherent in professional learning and teaching (Kelchtermans, 1996), and not a cause of harm to be avoided at all cost. Both Gilson (2011, 2014) and Brown (2013) stress vulnerability in learning as involving necessary levels of discomfort. For Gilson, vulnerability is “an experience born of discomfort with the unfamiliar, the uncontrolled or the unpredictable and yet only through muddling about in this experience do we learn, change and extend ourselves beyond our current limits” (Gilson, 2014, p. 127). In accepting this
view of vulnerability as universal, uncomfortable, and an uncertain and unavoidable aspect of learning, leaders must be prepared to share their own vulnerabilities rather than model and maintain their shield of invulnerability. This includes being open to being wrong and being placed in positions of uncertainty and discomfort (Gilson, 2014). It is also about being aware of and alert for feelings of vulnerability in others. Empathy and the ability to walk in another’s shoes are essential if we are serious about enhancing teachers’ learning. In the words of Harper Lee (1960) in To Kill a Mockingbird,

"First of all," he said, "if you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you'll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view [...] until you climb into his skin and walk around in it." (pp. 85-87)

In summary, when teachers experienced high perceptions of risk, they took fewer risks, which impacted negatively on their learning. Although the majority of teachers took risks and were successful in their PL, this research suggests that for the other teachers, viewing visible emotion and vulnerability as a weakness and similar to failure was detrimental for their learning. A strong interdependent relationship exists for teachers in professional learning between learning, perceptions of risk as uncertainty and vulnerability, emotion and relational factors such as trust. This research provides a model to further unpack and understand this complex relationship.

Navigating with a Risk Frame and Map: Implications for Practice and Policy

The findings of this research have implications for leadership practice in PL, including the impact of framing teacher learning, raising awareness of perceptions of risk as a possible explanation for apparent non-engagement in PL and the use of the proposed risk perception process model as a scaffold for educators. Accordingly, teachers’ apparent non-engagement in PL may indeed look different.

An overarching implication from this research centres on educators becoming highly aware of the frames that they and fellow educators use when they make sense of teachers’ PL experiences in their schools. This begins with educators questioning their own framing of teachers as learners and where they position responsibility for teachers’ engagement in PL. In doing so, educators would consider their influence on teacher learning, the context or school culture they support and where they position responsibility for teachers’ learning.
Additionally, raising educators’ awareness about the possibility of teachers experiencing perceptions of risk and feelings of vulnerability during PL may challenge how they currently frame uncertainty, the role of emotion in learning, mistakes and risk taking. Talking or sensegiving (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007) about emotion, mistakes, and risk as uncertainty, like talking about change (Le Fevre, 2010), may help raise educators’ awareness of the frames they hold and the possibility of perceptions of risk in PL. Talking about these frames would also provide a starting point to consider shared responsibility for teacher learning, in similar ways to what is expected of teachers for students’ learning.

This research highlighted that teachers’ apparent lack of learning and non-engagement in PL was commonly framed as resistance to change. When leaders were met by teacher emotion during the PL, the visible emotion and vulnerability were often framed negatively and considered troublesome and an unwelcome problem. As a consequence, this positioned emotion and vulnerability with the teacher who then became the focus of the problem. Additionally, the current societal ethos of individualism, along with the concepts of professionalism and personal responsibility, ensured that the solution for non-engagement lay firmly with the teacher. This framing did not support learning for the teachers whose PL journey was not plain sailing. The use of this negative frame either consciously or not, prevented leaders from inquiring deeply into the visible emotion to search for other possible explanations of the observed responses.

Reframing teachers’ emotional responses and actions through a risk lens challenged entrenched beliefs about teachers’ resistance to change, and in so doing, encouraged leaders to reframe existing teacher-as-problem beliefs to beliefs that focused on supporting teacher risk taking. The teachers in this research identified this support as being known as a learner, being shown empathy and respect, feeling supported and feeling trust.

The proposed risk perception process model provides a conceptual map for educators to navigate teachers’ perceptions of risk and feelings of vulnerability. The model makes explicit previously unseen or unconnected factors into a framework that can be used to highlight sources of uncertainty in the PL context. The model can be used in the planning phase of new PL to avoid unnecessary uncertainty and during the implementation phase to surface and reduce unanticipated uncertainty. Additionally, the model provides a frame for educators to use to make sense of teachers’ actions in new and more positive ways.
TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RISK IN PL

There will always be risk and uncertainty in learning, and therefore, it may always feel uncomfortable. Learners, whether children or adults, will take risks in their learning when they trust they will be secure, cared for, and supported as they make the inevitable mistakes inherent in learning (Timperley, Kaser, & Halbert, 2014). When these conditions are met, vulnerability becomes reframed positively, making invulnerability no longer the aspired-to norm.

Furthermore, educators must model vulnerability if they are serious in building trust and expecting teachers to take risks in their learning. In the words of Elmore (2000):

> Learning requires modeling: Leaders must lead by modeling the values and behavior that represent collective goods. Role-based theories of leadership wrongly envision leaders who are empowered to ask or require others to do things they may not be willing or able to do. But if learning, individual and collective, is the central responsibility of leaders, then they must be able to model the learning they expect of others. Leaders should be doing, and should be seen to be doing, that which they expect or require others to do. Likewise, leaders should expect to have their own practice subjected to the same scrutiny as they exercise toward others. (p. 21)

If we continue to frame and simplify teacher non-engagement in professional learning as wilful resistance and each teacher’s sole responsibility, we will overlook or be ignorant of other possible explanations for teachers’ responses and actions. Whose problem is teacher non-engagement in professional learning? If we want better results from professional learning, the problem must be shared. We cannot ignore teachers as learners in our quest for improved student achievement.

This research has implications for policy. New initiatives requiring change in practices inevitably bring additional uncertainty into schools, some of which, but not all, are essential for the change. As such, some sources of uncertainty may be ill considered and unnecessary, potentially creating unintended negative consequences (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006). For example, expectations for teachers to work collaboratively may appear a good idea but in reality can become more akin to contrived collegiality (Hargreaves, 1994) if trusting relationships and conditions that support risk taking are not present. This research demonstrated that supportive, trusting relationships lowered perceived risks for teachers as they learned to apply new knowledge and practices confidently in the presence of others. The conditions that support teacher learning take time to develop. Policy makers would...
therefore do well to consider teachers and leaders as learners and learning as risk taking when planning policies across the education sectors.

Suggestions for further research

This research has made links between uncertainty as perceptions of risk to responses, actions, and learning as risk taking with more explicitness than has existed to date. The following suggestions for further research might utilise both the conceptual framework and the findings to extend the current knowledge on teachers’ perceptions of risk in PL:

- The conceptual model of risk as uncertainty rather than risk as an event, coupled with the focus on teachers’ narratives, enabled me to capture teacher uncertainty as emotion, cognition and actions in the context of teacher professional learning. This approach might be used to investigate teachers’ perceptions of risk across a wider sample of teachers and different PL initiatives to extend or evaluate the current findings.

- The findings indicated that some teachers did not report perceptions of risk in the PL. A next step would be to investigate the effect of this low uncertainty or minimal perceptions of risk on learning. Are there optimum levels of uncertainty and discomfort necessary for learning and change? What factors, current and prior, contribute to teachers perceiving little or no risk in their PL context? It may then be possible to understand the sensemaking differences between teachers who report high perceptions of risk and those who report low or minimal risk.

- This research focused on teachers’ sensemaking of the uncertainty they perceived in their PL context. It did not measure or evaluate teachers’ implementation of the expected practices nor did it take into account the teachers’ current state of knowledge or their motivation to learn and change. It is plausible that motivation (and prior knowledge) will affect the amount of change in which teachers are willing to engage, thus influencing their perceptions of risk and learning.

- Further research might also focus on the use of the proposed model in PL and change. How useful is the proposed model in supporting educators to identify uncertainty in the PL context? Importantly, what do educators do as a result of identifying uncertainty? What sensegiving about risk, emotion and learning do educators successfully engage in? Exploring teachers’ responses to leaders risk-related actions
might also add to this knowledge. Most importantly, can the model support leaders to increase teachers’ engagement in PL, and does this improve learning for students?

Final word

Educators do not readily connect perceptions of risk and resistance to change. This research makes this connection. The findings from this research uncovered that many teachers experienced variable levels of perceptions of risk and feelings of vulnerability that impacted on their learning. Furthermore, leaders were more likely to make sense of teachers’ responses and actions to their perceptions of risk as resistance to change. The leaders in this research demonstrated that when they reframed teachers’ emotions and non-engagement as perceptions of risk they viewed teachers’ actions and responses more positively. It makes good sense to remind leaders and policy makers of teachers as learners and raise their awareness of perceptions of risk in learning and change.
Appendices

Appendix A: Key Terms

Ambiguity: several different interpretations are possible and plausible.

Complexity: refers to the “difficulty of identifying and quantifying causal links between a multitude of potential causal agents and specific observed effects.” (International Risk Governance Council [IRGC], 2005, p.29).

Emotion: “a wide range of affective processes, including feelings, moods, affects and well-being” (Boekaerts, 2010, p. 94).

Event: an occasion or situation such as meetings and lesson observations that participants were involved in as part of the professional learning.

Facilitator: a professional developer from outside the school who is employed to deliver professional learning for teachers and leaders. Also referred to as PL facilitator.

Frames: cognitive organisers that guide our perceptions and help us make sense of the world.

Others: refers collectively to those participants who held leadership positions in the school and or the PL. This included principals; facilitators; teachers who participated as teachers, and were also learning to lead PL; and in-school leaders, some directly and others not directly involved in this PL. For this analysis, others did not include teaching colleagues or non-school persons. The term others was selected to emphasise the self-other concept.

Professional learning (PL): refers to a programme of learning aimed at changing teacher practice. The professional learning in the research focused on formative assessment pedagogy. Professional learning is written in full when referring to learning for teachers.

Risk: “refers to uncertainty about and severity of the events and consequences (or outcomes) of an activity with respect to something that humans value” (Aven & Renn, 2009 p. 6).

Risk assessment: refers to the assessment (and identification) of the uncertainty connected to the event and consequence.

Risk evaluation: refers to evaluating the perception of risk, especially the significance of the possible risk in relation to self.

Risk judgment: the decision, broadly as acceptable/tolerable/unacceptable about the perceived risk based on assessment and evaluation of the uncertainty (IRGC, 2005).

Risk perception: an individual’s overall judgment (assessment and evaluation) of the possible risks (uncertainty connected to a future event and its consequences) and how these risks could affect them (Aven & Renn, 2009).

Uncertainty: reflects a state of knowledge where things are not known, not certain, or not sure about something in the future. Uncertainty can result from insufficient information, understanding or clarity.

Vulnerability: inward looking feelings (expressed as emotions) and thoughts (cognition) that occur when uncertainty towards an anticipated event or its consequences that challenges one’s identity or emotional security.
Appendix B: Interview Protocols

Each group of participant interviews were conducted using a different set of questions. The introduction and completion remained the same for all. The following selection of interview questions is included:

1. Teacher Interview (Year 1: Time 1)
2. Teacher Interview (Year 1: Time 2)
3. Teacher Interview (Year 2: Time 1)
4. Leader Interview (Year 1: Time 1)
5. Leader Interview (Year 2: Time 2)
6. Facilitator Interview (Year 2: Time 1)
7. Facilitator Interview (Year 2: Time 2)
8. Risk process model (draft) discussed with participants (Year 2: Time 2)

Introduction to the interview

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. I appreciate the time you are taking to have this conversation with me.

Assurance of confidentiality and anonymity

Today I am going to task you about your experiences, understandings, beliefs and feelings about facilitation and perceptions of risk in Professional learning and change.

Please feel that you do not have to answer questions you do not feel comfortable with or don’t wish to answer.

Before we begin, is it all right for me to record this interview? You can stop it at any time. I will be getting it transcribed and I will get you a copy to edit for anything you wish to change or delete.

Your conversation will be given a code in place of your name to assure anonymity.

Closing the Interview Sessions: Final question

If there were something that you don't know but you would like to know around PL and perceptions of risk what would it be?

Is there anything you want to add?

Thank you for sharing your time and your thoughts with me. What you have shared with me is important and will help me understand more about ways to reduce risk for everyone involved in professional learning. Once I have transcribed the interview I will get you to check it for accuracy and intent.

Do you have any questions? Thank you.

Note: Sensemaking (SM); PL Professional learning (PL); Perceptions of risk (PoR)
1. Teacher Interview (Year 1: Time 1)

1. Professional Learning: Framing - Problem, Solution

I’d like you to think about your experience of effective PL. Tell me what made it effective for you as a teacher? Tell me about any changes to your teaching practice?

Tell me what you know about this PL? How do you feel about it so far? What do you still want or need to know? Any what ifs or surprises?

Why do you think your school has opted for this PL? How do you know? What have been the reasons given? (Possible discrepancies conflicting views?)

What do you think the school is trying to achieve with this PL? How do you know? Do you have any reservations or 'issues' around the PL? What are they?

How do you think the PL will affect/impact on you? What do you think you will have to do? In the short and longer term? Expected changes? How do you feel about this?

How willing are you to get involved and make the changes expected? What makes you say this? What would change this view? Conditions? Prompt for school/leader/teacher/school culture/PL itself

What might happen if you don’t make the changes?

What are the main challenges that you anticipate in this PL? For others? What makes you think that?

2. Teacher’s perceptions of risk for self- the 'story' behind risk frame

I want you to think about what you have been expected to do as part of PL in the past. Tell me about any situations where you thought about ‘what if’s” when trying out the expected changes from the PL?

What happened, what did you do? What did it feel like?

How do facilitators increase/decrease perceptions of risk in PL?

How do leaders increase/decrease perceptions of risk in PL?

Do you talk with others about this PL? Do you ever talk about what concerns you in PL? Who/how do you approach the topic? How did/do people respond? Can you give me an example? Have you talked to others about what concerns you about this PL? If NOT, are there any barriers to talking about your concerns about this PL?

Do your leaders talk with you about risk? What do they say?

2. Teacher Interview (Year 1: Time 2)

1. Changes in actions and thinking

I’d like you to ask you about this PL and the changes you have made to your classroom practices. What are you doing differently compared to the start of the year? Tell me about this… Probe for link to examples/reason

What makes these ‘new practices” better or worse? What changes/learning has been challenging for you? Why?

What makes some challenge acceptable/tolerable but other challenge unacceptable? Are there changes you are unlikely to make? Reasons? What might happen if you don’t make these changes?

2: Perceptions of risk and influence of others on willingness

How has this PL affected/impacted on you? As a learner? What makes you think that?
How are you feeling about this? What makes you say this?

Where do perceptions of risk fit for you in your learning of these new practices? They may not?

If YES: Can you tell me about a time(s) when you were thinking that things could be ‘risky’ for you? What happened, what did you do? How were you feeling at the time? What contributed to these feelings, How did it turn out? Prompt for school/leader/facilitator/teacher/school culture/PL itself/self as learner

If you could change something to increase your willingness to engage in this PL to change your classroom practice - what would it be? Would this reduce your PoR – in what way? Prompt for school/leader/facilitator/teacher/school culture/PL itself/ self as a learner/ connection to perceptions of risk /Timing

What if any perceptions of risk do you have about this PL in the future?

Who have you talked to about this PL? What kind of things do you talk about? (Successes/concerns/learning)

Do your leaders/facilitator talk with you about risk and learning?

3. Risk and willingness - check

Overall, are there times when PoR are higher and willingness lower? What do you think explains this? Is this how it has been for you?

Also: I have been wondering about the impact of me asking you about risk and PL. Comments? Some people say that you create risk by talking about it. What would you say to them?

Is there anything you would like to ask me about my research or risk and PL?

3. Teacher Interview (Year 2: Time 1)

1. Professional Learning: Framing - Problem, Solution

Tell me what you know about this PL? How do you feel about it so far? What do you still want or need to know? Any what ifs or surprises?

Why do you think your school has opted for this PL? How do you know?

What do you think the school is trying to achieve with this PL? How do you know?

Do you have any reservations or 'issues' around the PL? What are they?

2. After first observation and feedback

How did your first observation/feedback go? Was it as expected? What did you do to in anticipation of the observation? How are you feeling about it?

How do you think the PL will affect/impact on you? What do you think you will have to do? Changes - short and longer term?

What might you do as a result of your concerns? Before your next observation. How willing are you to make the changes expected? What makes you say this? What would change this view? Conditions? Prompt for school /leader /teacher /school culture/PL itself

What might happen if you don’t make the changes?

What are the main challenges that you anticipate for you in this PL? What makes you think that? What are you most concerned about? What are you likely to do? Who might you go to?

3. Teacher’s perceptions of risk for self- the 'story' behind risk frame
I want you to ask you about perceptions of risk and PL – have you ever connected them before? How? What about now? How would you describe PoR? Tell me … about a time when you had perceptions of risk with PL (if any)…

Uncertainty seems to link with PL- What uncertainty is there for you in PL? Does uncertainty link to PoR for you, how? What (if anything) do you do about it?

Another of my ideas links risk, uncertainty and vulnerability. What do you think? What is being vulnerable? What do you do about these feelings?

How do facilitators (leaders) increase/decrease perceptions of risk in PL? What about just general conditions within the school?

4. Leader Interview (Year 1: Time 1)

1. Professional Learning: Framing - Problem, Solution

What do you consider important when providing PL for your teachers? What is the leader’s role in enabling this to happen?

What were your reasons for deciding to begin this current PL? Has this reason changed since then?

What is it that you want to achieve with this PL? How do you see this happening? How do you see your role in supporting this PL (as a leader)?

Do you think your views about this PL are understood/known by others? What makes you think this? How does your leadership team/teachers view the PL? How do you know? Any surprises? Possible discrepancies conflicting views?

How much do you talk about the PL with your team/staff? Are there any specific reasons or triggers for bringing it up?

What do you think will make this school more likely to be successful with this PL? Prompt for school/leader/teacher/school culture/PL itself

What are the main challenges that you anticipate in this PL? Leaders; teachers; facilitator? What makes you think that?

2. Leader’s perceptions of risk for self- the 'story' behind risk frame

Let’s now talk about risk and PL. Before I came how if at all did the concept of risk fit into PL for you - maybe it didn’t? What about now, any change in thinking – what has triggered this?

Can you remember a situation when you thought things were ‘risky’ for you in PL? (as a teacher or leader) What happened? What did it feel like? What did you do?

Now thinking specifically about your role as leader for this PL…How do you see your role in increasing or decreasing perceptions of risk in PL? Do you think you affect teachers PoR? Tell me what you have done so far? What about the role of the facilitator?

Do you talk with anyone about perceptions of risk? Can you give me an example? Are there any barriers or concerns for you to talk about risk?

3. Leader’s perceptions of risk for teachers

Let’s now talk about this PL and your teachers. What are your teachers going to have to do (not do) as a result of this PL?

What do you think the teachers need to know/understand to be successful in this PL?
What do you anticipate the teachers may feel about this? What makes you think this?
How willing do you think they will be to make the changes? What makes you think this?
Do you anticipate any potential risks for the teachers in the PL? What makes you think this? Do you anticipate the teachers perceiving any other risks in these changes? What may they be? Facilitator If not already mentioned
Do you have any other reservations, 'issues' or “what ifs” about this PL that may need to be considered? What are they? How do/did you know this?

5. Leader Interview (Year 2: Time 2)

1. Sensemaking of changes and challenges for others and self in the PL
   I’d like to ask you about the changes that you are aware that your teachers have made in their classrooms with this PL. Tell me about what are they doing or learning to do (understand) differently? How do you think they have felt about making these changes? How do you know? What has been challenging for them in the PL? Reasons? What did you do? How did it go?

2. Leader’s perceptions of resistance
   Last time I asked you about teacher resistance and PL in general. Have you noticed any resistance with this PL? Tell me about that. What do you think is behind this? How did you as a leader respond to this? Things you did and things you may not have done. How did the teacher(s) respond? What other interpretation could there be?

3. Leader’s ideas behind perceptions of risk and PL. Probe changes
   I also asked you about risk and PL. You were thinking that … Have you had any further thoughts about perceptions of risk and PL since then? Tell me …
   Any examples this year where perceptions of risk may have contributed to a situation? Explain… Did you anticipate this? What did you do, how did it go?
   What influence might the context other leaders and facilitators have in this?
   What about your influence? Probe teachers PoR if not mentioned. Were you aware of teachers experiencing any PoR in the PL? How did you know and what could explain them?

4. Theory Checking – Show risk process diagram
   My research is suggesting a link between uncertainty, vulnerability and perceptions of risk and how they affect peoples’ learning for change. What do you think about this? Especially their effect on teachers’ learning?
   Explore the diagram (see below) for disconfirmation. What may I have misinterpreted or missed? Are there other explanations for teachers’ uncertainty in PL? Probe
   Vulnerability is tricky to talk about and define. Does it work in the diagram? Can you help me define it better?
   What might I include as contextual factors? Probe: How about you, other leaders? Facilitators? School culture
   Any other thoughts on risk, uncertainty and vulnerability in PL and their effect on peoples’ learning. Are perceptions of risk useful to connect to PL?
6. Facilitator Interview (Year 2: Time 1)

1. Framing - Problem, Solution

What were your first impressions of this school? What did the scoping suggest? What were the reasons given for this school applying for leadership and assessment PL? What do you think? Possible discrepancies conflicting views - explain?

How do you think others (teachers /leaders) in the school view the reason for the PL? How do you know? What’s the school trying to achieve with PL?

How is it planned to happen? What are the teachers going to have to learn to do (or not do), as a result of this PL?

How do you anticipate the teachers may feel/think about this? What makes you think this?

What makes this school more or less likely to be successful with PL for change? Prompt for school/leader/teacher/school culture/PL itself. What challenges/ 'issues' do you anticipate? What makes you think this? What will you do?

2. Facilitator’s perceptions/beliefs around teacher resistance

Let’s now talk about resistance, risk and PL. Firstly, what’s your take on teacher resistance to change? How do you tell if someone is being resistant to the expected changes?

Are you anticipating any resistance with this PL? Do you have specific staff in mind – How might they respond. What do you think is behind this?

What other interpretation could there be?

How have you as a facilitator responded to teacher resistance in the past. How did it go? What might you do this time?

3: Facilitators’ perceptions of risk for self- the 'story' behind risk frame

Let’s now talk about, risk and PL. Have you ever connected risk and PL for change before - maybe you hadn’t? What do perceptions of risk mean for you? As a facilitator? What about now that I have put it out there, any change in your thinking –?

Have you ever talked about risk and learning and change together? Tell me…. Barriers?

Think about a time when you may have thought things were ‘risky’ for you as a facilitator? What happened, what did you do? What did it feel like? What things/situations heightened or lessened these for you?

4. Facilitators’ perceptions of risk for others –teachers (leaders)

Do you anticipate any of your teachers having any concerns or perceptions of risk while engaging in this PL? When, with what aspects of the PL? How will you know? What might be behind these feelings? How might you respond or not? Do you think you can make a difference to their PoR… tell me how?

What do leaders do to increase/decrease perceptions of risk for the teachers (and you) in PL?
7. Facilitator Interview (Year 2: Time 2)

1: Sensemaking of changes; challenges for others and self in the PL

I’d like to ask you about the changes that the teachers have made in their classrooms with this PL. Tell me… What are they doing or learning to do (understand) differently? How do you know?

What has been challenging for them in the PL? Reasons …How have they felt? What did you do? How did it go

What have been your main challenges/tensions in facilitating this PL? *Prompt: leaders/culture/facilitation/individual teachers/PL itself*

2: Facilitator’s perceptions/beliefs around teacher resistance

Last time I asked you about teacher resistance and PL in general. Have you noticed any resistance with this PL in this school? Can you tell me about that? What do you think is behind this?

How did you respond to this? Things you did and things you may not have done. Did any of the school leaders take action? Explain … How did the teacher(s) respond? Explain …

What other interpretation could there be?

3: Facilitators’ perceptions of risk and PL – probing for changes

I also asked you about risk and PL. You were thinking that . . . Have you had any further thoughts about perceptions of risk and PL since then? Tell me …

Any examples this year where perceptions of risk may have contributed to a situation? Explain. Did you anticipate this? What did you do, how did it go?

4. Facilitators’ perceptions of risk for others and awareness of their possible impact on others’ PoR (*If not answered in above*)

Did you notice any of your teachers having concerns or perceptions of risk while engaging in this PL? When, with what aspects of the PL? How did you know? What might be behind these feelings? How did you respond or not? What about school factors – leaders?

Do you think you effect their PoR… tell me how? Increase/decrease

What about leaders? What have leaders done to increase/decrease perceptions of risk for the teachers (and you) in PL? Any other factors?

5. Theory Checking: Show diagram

My research is suggesting a link between uncertainty, vulnerability and perceptions of risk and how they affect peoples’ learning for change. What do you think about this? *Especially their effect on peoples’ learning.*

Explore the diagram for disconfirmation. What may I have misinterpreted or missed? Are there other explanations for teachers’ uncertainty in PL? Probe

Vulnerability is tricky to talk about and define. Does it work in the diagram? Can you help me define it better?

What might I include as contextual factors? Probe: *How about you, other leaders? Facilitators? School culture*

Any other thoughts on risk uncertainty and vulnerability and their effect on learning?

Are perceptions of risk useful to connect to PL?
Risk process model (emergent) discussed with participants as part of Year Two: Time 2 interviews:
## Appendix C: Interview Question Foci

Indicative interview question foci showing change over time for participants:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant &amp; Year</th>
<th>Time 1</th>
<th>Time 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Teachers Year One** | Professional Learning Frames:  
Effective PL  
Current PL problem & solution frame – cues  
Impact of PL on self -challenges  
Awareness of ‘what if’s’ in prior PL and this PL  
Impact of others on perceptions of risk  
Sensegiving by others about risk | Current sensemaking of PL- changes  
Impact of PL on self  
Own perception of risks - PL  
Sensemaking of perceived risks  
Sensemaking risks in current PL  
Risks in this PL  
Impact of others on perceptions of risk  
Sensegiving by others about risk |
| **Teachers Year Two** | Professional Learning Frames:  
Effective PL  
Current PL problem & solution frame – cues  
Impact of PL on self -challenges  
Assessment of risks - Events  
Sensemaking of perceived risks  
*Actions thoughts feelings*  
Sensemaking risk in PL (prior)  
Risk in PL: Uncertainty  
Vulnerability  
Impact of others on perceptions of risk | Current sensemaking of PL- changes  
Impact of PL on self: *actions*  
Challenges  
Assessment of perceived risks - events  
*Actions: thoughts feelings*  
*Actions in learning*  
Sensemaking of risk in this PL  
Risk in PL: *Uncertainty*  
Vulnerability  
*Checking emergent risk process model*  
Impact of others on perceptions of risk (model) |
| **Leaders Year One** | Professional Learning Frames:  
Effective PL  
Current PL problem & solution frame – cues  
Sensegiving about PL  
Possible impact/challenges of PL for self and others  
Own concepts of risk in PL  
Own impact on risk in PL for others  
Sensegiving about risk  
PL and teachers- Learn  
Teachers feelings towards PL and change  
Assessment of perceived risks-Teachers’ willingness to engage - cues used  
Impact of facilitator/others on perceptions of risk | Current sensemaking of PL- changes:  
learning; actions  
Impact of PL for self and others- actions  
Own concepts of risk in PL (changes)  
Risk in current PL  
*Actions taken*  
Own impact on risk in PL for others  
Sensegiving about risk  
Assessment of risks for teachers- cues used  
Risk & willingness connection  
Sensemaking of non-engagement  
Impact of others on perceptions of risk  
Impact of researcher talking about risk |
<table>
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<th>Leaders Year Two</th>
<th>Professional Learning Frames: Effective PL</th>
<th>Current sensemaking of PL- changes: learning; actions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Possible impact/challenges of PL for self and others</td>
<td>Impact of PL for self and others-actions</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Resistance in PL</td>
<td>Resistance in current PL</td>
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<tr>
<td>Possible resistance in current PL</td>
<td>Own theories &amp; actions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Own theories &amp; actions</td>
<td>Own concepts of risk in PL-actions</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Own concepts of risk in PL- prior, actions</td>
<td>Perceived risks for teachers –feelings – cues used</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensegiving about risk</td>
<td>Risk in PL: Uncertainty</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sensemaking of perceived risks for teachers –feelings - Cues used</td>
<td>Vulnerability</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Own impact on risk in PL for others</td>
<td>Impact of others/ context on perceptions of risk (model)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Facilitators Year One</th>
<th>Professional Learning Frames: Effective PL</th>
<th>Current sensemaking of PL- changes: learning; actions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time 1:</td>
<td>Impact of PL for self and others-actions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Possible challenges of PL</td>
<td>Resistance in current PL</td>
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<tr>
<td>Own concepts of risk in PL- prior</td>
<td>Own theories &amp; actions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own impact on risk in PL for others</td>
<td>Own concepts of risk in PL-actions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact of leaders on risk in PL for others</td>
<td>Perceived risks for teachers –feelings – cues used</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL and Risk - teachers</td>
<td>Risk in current PL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers feelings towards PL and change</td>
<td>Vulnerability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of risks for teachers in PL; perceived willingness - cues used</td>
<td>Impact of others/ context on perceptions of risk (model)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensegiving about risk</td>
<td>Impact of researcher talking about risk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of future risk in PL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facilitators Year Two</th>
<th>Professional Learning Frames: Effective PL</th>
<th>Current sensemaking of PL- changes: learning; actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Possible challenges of PL</td>
<td>Impact of PL for self and others-actions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance in PL; current PL</td>
<td>Resistance in current PL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own theories &amp; actions</td>
<td>Own concepts of risk in PL</td>
<td>_ changes; actions _</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own concepts of risk in PL - prior, actions</td>
<td>Assessment of risks for teachers – feelings - cues used</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensegiving about risk</td>
<td>Own impact on risk in PL for others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL, risk and teachers</td>
<td>Impact of others/ context on perceptions of risk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of possible risks for teachers – feelings - cues used</td>
<td>Risk in PL: Uncertainty &amp; Vulnerability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own impact on risk in PL for others</td>
<td>Impact of others/ context on perceptions of risk (model)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact of leaders on risk in PL for others</td>
<td>Checking emergent risk process model</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensegiving about risk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of future risk in PL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Underlining indicates new foci and/or new terminology used in interviews*
### Appendix D: Thematic Coding Samples

Extracts from thematic coding schemes: Uncertainty; resistance frame and risk frame:

#### Uncertainty Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Code</th>
<th>Sub-category</th>
<th>Description &amp; Explanation</th>
<th>Examples: Teachers’ transcripts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Existing uncertainty in context</td>
<td>Prior experience</td>
<td>Teachers referred to prior PL experience and teaching experiences as affecting their initial responses to current PL</td>
<td>When I was getting observed in the first years of my profession, it went negatively. I was like ‘great, another one’. ‘What are we going to do this time’, kind of thing. I think as a staff, we’re all so different, and there are some people who will hate everything and there were some - we’re all different. Oh, no, here comes something else that - the flavour of the month, sort of thing. How long’s this going to last and will it actually benefit us? I do want a good reference from my principal. And that’s always at the back of my mind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL makes me think about...</td>
<td>Expected ways of responding to something new</td>
<td>Talked about personal factors and ways they and others responded to change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Existing in-school factors</td>
<td>Referred to in-school issues – employment status, relationships; teaching generally; duration of PL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty connected to a future event</td>
<td>Organisation and purpose</td>
<td>Detail about the PL, its management and organisation</td>
<td>My main concern would be definitely is it here to stay? I don’t understand why it’s been brought in. I like knowing the organisation of things. Are we wasting time here? Could we have used this time for something else? We didn’t actually know what the content of it was. It was just, oh, we’ve got (facilitators) coming in to talk to you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do I know enough about this PL?</td>
<td>Included: communication- clarity, sufficiency; perceived purpose, relevance, likelihood of effectiveness, connection to current practice; practical elements- dates, schedules, timing; effect on current workload;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relationships with others</td>
<td>Perceived quality of each inter-personal relationship connected to the PL including: Not knowing an existing person well enough; a new person; trust &amp; confidentiality; connectedness to</td>
<td>If you don’t have the relationship with the people – we are like the kids. If you don’t have that relationship, you’re not prepared to take the risk. Because I know the school leaders and the facilitators I don’t know. Again it depends on the facilitator and how much you trust them to keep</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Knowledge and skills

**Do I have the knowledge and skills to do what is expected of me?**

Teachers perceptions of the knowledge and skills required with respect to their perceived competence. Knowledge gaps such as content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. Related to not knowing, confusion or ambiguity. Can I do it? Will I get it right? Time frame & amount of change.

I don’t know how can I reach the next step at this stage by Thursday. We’re not really sure on what we’re meant to be achieving or what it’s meant to look like, ... just exactly how am I going to fit it in trying something that I don’t know and don’t know will work not having an actual clear understanding of what I’m expected to do. Where do I start if I don’t know?

### Sources of Evidence

**What will be used to judge me and my practice?**

The range of evidence collected and perceptions pertaining to possible use of this evidence by others. Range of information: Observation data; feedback; walkthrough; student voice; student achievement data. Possible use: support for learning and development, evaluations or judgments, surveillance, appraisal. Includes notions of exposure to others and confidentiality.

what I am going to attempt to do is not going to be misused against me. Watch you teach something that you haven’t quite got and then think, oh, actually, ... doesn’t know anything about it, ... hasn’t been doing it, she hasn’t been researching. You also wonder about the conversations that are held outside that observation. Is this person going to take that to somebody else and have a discussion about it? It’s just an observation, so it could have been me having a bad day. I’ll start to be concerned that they’ll take that as being representative of my teaching practice, the new thing.

### Uncertainty connected to consequences of a future event

Outcomes for Self

“Will I get it right, and what might this mean for me, or how might others evaluate my...”

Teachers concerns at the possible consequences of the ‘event’, especially if it doesn’t go well. Getting it right/wrong – and what might this mean for me?

Impact of the PL on

There is risk, you can get it wrong, ... I worry about getting things wrong. So I was worried that I’d spend all that time and it wouldn’t really pay off. There is a lot of things where I fear whether I’m doing it right, and I think that’s a really big thing, actually, I believe, for a lot of staff.
**TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RISK IN PL**

**Am I doing it right? There’s a lot of uncertainty.**

because any information about how I’m doing affects whether I get a permanent contract here

**Yeah, and for the kids as well. ...**

They need what works like now)

I have felt sceptical about what is gonna suit them and what’s gonna work for them

I’m more likely to accept I need to change my teaching style if this is gonna benefit my kids.

**When uncertainty of an event or its consequences threaten teacher’s identity or security**

What if … can lead to feelings of vulnerability, loss of confidence, doubt; loss of face as a person and professional; emotional component, inward looking

**What will I think of myself?**

Do I fit the mould? Am I doing the job? Do I deserve to be here? It could be considered self-doubt look bad in front of someone

Once you put yourself on the line with an observation . . . you’re still put in a position of vulnerability.

**Resistance Frame Codes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thematic code</th>
<th>Description &amp; Explanation</th>
<th>Examples: Leaders/Facilitators’ transcripts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of knowledge</td>
<td>Lack of knowledge as a problem that needs to be hidden</td>
<td>because some of them do have poor practice and it is getting exposed. It’s a risk of exposure feel like that they can’t do it so they don’t want to it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relates to not having enough knowledge or skills; knowledge as teacher responsibility</td>
<td>not being prepared, and not doing the reading, so don’t have the knowledge don’t have the knowledge base therefore behind them to be</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Teachers’ Perceptions of Risk in PL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher themselves: Resisting change</th>
<th>Personality or disposition</th>
<th>Belief that personality determines willingness; not wanting to change.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emotion as a problem; people are their emotions e.g. anxious</td>
<td>was very resistant I guess in the first instance because ... was in tears some of them took the comments quite personally and couldn’t see the professional nature of it. Some people will want to engage and some people don’t. I don’t want to do it, just because I don’t some people just can’t actually ever change the way they are. “I don’t want people to tell me what to do.” I don’t know.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Conflicting beliefs                  | Don’t believe in the change so don’t/won’t Beliefs about learning & teaching differ Belief existing practices are better | when things don’t quite fit with ... scheme in ... way of believing and thinking what teaching should this is the way that my students learn,” that maybe they hadn’t really bought into it or it didn’t suit what they expected they think what they’re doing is fine and they don’t need to improve as well. some of them are so deep-seated in their beliefs that I could never move them |

| Poor work ethic:                    | Not wanting to increase workload / extra work Assumption that teachers don’t want to do the extra work that is needed for change. | I’d say, yeah, some of it’s about being judged, some of it will be accountability, the fact that they might not have been as well prepared as should be. haven’t done the work The workload always comes up, they don’t want the extra workload I don’t think they like to do the work. |

| Prefer status quo:                  | Those who are comfortable with what they are doing are less likely to want to change; Don’t / won’t try something new | They just didn’t want to change anything ... Because they were comfortable with the status quo. Because they were comfortable with the status quo. They didn’t want this and they didn’t want that. I think you can probably get them |
especially at the start resisting for a number of reasons – those who already feel that their practices are quite adequate. people start off squealing I think at the start you’ve always got a few that, ‘oh I don’t want to do this

Fear of exposure, failure and being judged

Teachers don’t want to be judged or accountable to others– Implication/assumption that teacher will fail or not measure up Teachers fear of being found out or exposed

I had one yesterday to one teacher that was quite resistant to being observed. There’s this great fear of being observed ‘cos they don’t want to be judged They want to be perfect . . . , and if they get judged then it’s not perfect, yeah. so that fear of being found out and asked questions some of it’s about being judged, some of it will be accountability, the fact that they might not have been as well prepared as should be if the teachers are worried then maybe they know that they’ve got something to worry

Risk Frame Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thematic code</th>
<th>Description &amp; Explanation</th>
<th>Examples: Leaders/Facilitators' transcripts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main Code</td>
<td>Sub-category</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships link to willingness to try</td>
<td>-when you’re trying to change, it’s risky, and they need to have that trust. -It does hinge on relationships because it becomes much riskier if you haven’t got a relationship -I’ve got good relationships where we can sit down and talk about it. -I think school culture’s huge in the PD cos unless people feel safe, then they’re not going to participate -the relationships are much better and so people are willing to try out things</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used words: trust; support; knowing others; safety</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Teacher themselves: Perceiving risk (uncertainty & vulnerability)

Need to get it right and concern for getting things wrong- Teachers wanting to do things well, get it right Worry and feel bad about doing things wrong impacts on willingness. Includes feeling judged

-I guess they are nervous but they were - there was a real willingness or want to do it right. teachers here feel really judged and if you really judge people then they are going to go back to what they know works rather than take a risk and try
TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RISK IN PL

- differs from resistance (not wanting to be judged)
- Separate from knowledge

Vulnerability and confidence in knowledge:
- Linked to feeling ashamed about knowledge/skills
- Implication don’t want to be seen to not know
- Don’t have the knowledge base or are confused about the PL
- Linked to unable to be successful
- Not linked to being found out or hiding something
- Uncertainty and confidence linked

Personality disposition
- Related to being scared or anxious to try something new
- People with emotions and emotional responses (that make it harder)

and make a change, and if people get things wrong then, that’s okay
So if you’re scared of trying to do something new and sometimes it’s hard trying to do something new, that what you’re doing isn’t going to be considered good enough,
I think the ones that are reluctant tend to have a bit of a fear of doing things wrong, doing things incorrect.

sometimes they weren’t sure what was expected.
Putting yourself out there is a risk
I can feel that it’s quite a risk going in maybe if observations previously haven’t been too good or whatever and you’re trying to think about how you can do that
The risk of being seen that it appears that you don’t know. The risk that you’re not good enough
: Possibly appearing to know, . . .
them to feel a bit shamed in front of their peers
I just think it’s a wanting to always know that you know it, but then when you’re in a situation where you don’t know it and you’re learning

-SO if you’re scared of trying to do something new and sometimes it’s hard trying to do something new
-they just wanted to get it right, they’re those kind of people
-people on a continuum that need more support and less support.
So if you’re scared of trying to do something new and sometimes it’s hard trying to do something new
One teacher that I got in my group is nervous but I just think that’s just them
Appendix E: Sample Ethics Documents

Participant Information Sheet

Teachers in Schools working with Facilitators

Research Project Title: Professional Development for Educational Change

Researcher:
Kaye Twyford
University of Auckland
Faculty of Education

Research Supervisors:
Dr Deidre Le Fevre  Professor Helen Timperley
University of Auckland  University of Auckland
Faculty of Education  Faculty of Education

Kaye Twyford, PhD student, supervised by Professor Helen Timperley and Dr Deidre Le Fevre, would like to invite you to participate in this research. The purpose of this research is to understand the extent to which school teachers, school leaders, and professional developers in Ministry of Education professional development contracts perceive activities of professional development for schooling improvement to involve risk, and identify interventions and processes that demonstrate the extent to which teachers are willing to take risks and the reasons for this. Your school has been selected because it is typical of the group of schools the facilitator is working with in a professional development role. The research would take place between March 2013 and October 2013.

Your participation will be voluntary. We have a written assurance from your employers that your employment will not be affected by your participation or non-participation.

As part of the research the researcher will ask you to:

- **Complete a questionnaire** in Term 1 that consists of a series of statements related to your risk taking with ratings for perceived risk and your willingness to undertake risk; (this will take approximately 30 minutes). The facilitator and school leaders will complete a different version of the questionnaire with statements related to your risk taking with ratings for perceived risk and your willingness to undertake risk. Only your school will be identified on the questionnaire. You will not be asked to put your name on the questionnaire. The researcher will collect all completed questionnaires.

- **Re-do the questionnaire in October 2013** (this will take approximately 30 minutes). The researcher will also **re-administer the questionnaire** to the same school leaders. The researcher will collect your completed questionnaire. The researcher will analyse the questionnaires for patterns and trends.

**You may also be invited to participate in 2 interviews between March and October 2013** (this will take about 45 minutes each time). Participants (n=10) will be selected on the basis that their responses represent a range of responses to the questionnaire, that is, differing degrees of perceived risk. If you are selected, this interview will be audio-recorded. All participants will be invited to give specific consent for audio recording and subsequent
transcribing. Participants can ask that the tape recorder be turned off at any time. Participants will be given a copy of their own transcript and the opportunity to edit it. No-one else other than themselves, researchers and transcribers, who sign a confidentiality agreement, will see their transcripts.

You may choose to withdraw from participation without giving a reason at any time prior to the completion of data collection by October 2013. All collected data will be stored in a secure database at Auckland University for six years and destroyed thereafter.

Following the researcher’s analysis of the data, a report will be written that is intended to inform future practice. Neither individuals nor schools will be identified in any reporting other than by the identifier known only to the researchers for the report. This information will remain completely confidential. Reports, articles and feedback arising from this research will not identify any sources of the data.

Thank you very much for your time and help in making this project possible. We would be pleased to give more information about the project on request. If you have any questions or concerns you wish to discuss please contact the appropriate person from the following current members of the research team. Please note that some members of the research team may change.

Dr Deidre Le Fevre
Faculty of Education, University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019, Auckland Mail Centre 1142
Tel: 09 623 8899
Email d.lefevre@auckland.ac.nz

Professor Helen Timperley
Faculty of Education, University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019, Auckland Mail Centre 1142
Tel: 09-623 8899 ext 87401.
Email h.timperley@auckland.ac.nz

Kaye Twyford
Faculty of Education, University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019, Auckland Mail Centre 1142
Tel: 09-623 8899 ext 48142.
Email k.twyford@auckland.ac.nz

Associate Professor Christine Rubie-Davies
Head of School of Teaching, Learning and Development
Faculty of Education, University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019, Auckland Mail Centre 1142
Tel: 09 623 8899
Email: c.rubie@auckland.ac.nz

For any questions regarding ethical concerns you may contact the Chairperson of the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee

The Chairperson
University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee
The University of Auckland, Office of the Vice Chancellor
Private Bag 92019, Auckland Mail Centre 1142
Tel: 09-373 7599 ext 87830

Approved by the UNIVERSITY of AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE on 18 June 2012 for (3) years. Reference Number 8138
CONSENT FORM

Teachers working with Facilitators from the

THIS FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF 6 YEARS

Research project title: Professional Development for Educational Change

Researchers: Kaye Twyford (PhD student)
Dr Deidre Le Fevre (Research Supervisor)
Professor Helen Timperley (Research Supervisor)

I have read the Participant Information Sheet, and have understood the nature of the research and why I have been invited to participate. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction.

I agree that my participation is voluntary and understand that a written assurance has been given that my participation or non-participation will not affect my employment status.

I understand that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time and to withdraw any data traceable to me up until October 2013 without having to give reasons.

I understand that I will be asked to complete a questionnaire that will take 30 minutes. I understand I will then be asked to complete the same questionnaire again, which will take a further 30 minutes.

I understand that I may be invited to participate in 2 interviews (approximately 45 minutes each time) that will be audio recorded. I understand that I can ask at any time for the recorder to be turned off. I understand that the audio recording will be transcribed by a transcriber who has signed a confidentiality agreement and that I may edit the transcript if I choose to.

I understand that my privacy and confidentiality will be protected at all times and that neither the names of the organisation, facilitators, schools, leaders nor teachers will be identified throughout the course of the research or in any publication that arises from it. I understand that I must protect the confidentiality of all other participants at all times.

I understand that the data will be stored securely at Auckland University and will be destroyed after a period of six years.

I agree / do not agree (circle one) to my interview being audio recorded if I am invited to participate.

Name________________________ Position _________________________

Signature _______________________ Date ______________

Approved by the UNIVERSITY of AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE on 18 June 2012 for (3) years. Reference Number 8138
References


Aven, T., & Renn, O. (2009). On risk defined as an event where the outcome is uncertain. *Journal of Risk Research, 12*(1), 1-11. doi:10.1080/13669870802488883


TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RISK IN PL


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