ENCOURAGING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

by

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A DISSERTATION

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Title: ENCOURAGING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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The purpose of this study was to conduct, as a participant observer and district-level regional administrator, three exploratory mini-case studies of elementary schools in the same district attempting to meet the same district improvement goal, imbedded in individual School Improvement Plans (SIP) during the same period of time in the school year.

In order to document how each leadership team identifies strategies to meet the goal, how strategies are implemented, how each leadership team interacts with me as their district administrator, and how performance toward meeting the goal is perceived by key actors in the school this research was conducted as an action-research case study. The inter-relationships between school goals and school leadership team behaviors in a large suburban school district and the influence of these teams on the practices of the individuals on each of the three different school teams were the primary focus of this study.

This study took place beginning in December 2007 and culminating in March 2008. The researcher kept a field journal of team meetings and staff development

activities at each site. Interviews were conducted with principals, teachers, and parents at each site to gain multiple perspectives of school improvement and leadership. Findings of this case study may reveal a close connection between the practices of the regional administrator and school leadership teams and the outcome of school improvement initiatives. Recommendations are made for changes in practice and for future research studies.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter Page

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The role of many central office administrators in public school systems in the United States has evolved from a primary role of business management to one of "educational leadership." For example, prior to 1960, the geographic area of what is now the city of Beaverton was represented by 13 school districts, each headed by a small administrative staff. In his history entitled, *School Days, A History of Public Schools In and Around Beaverton, Oregon 1856-2000*, Varner (2000) provided a portrayal of what these administrators did in the early years of public schools in this area. The main priority for early district leaders, commonly referred to as "District Clerks," focused almost exclusively on monitoring the census of eligible students and on the highly related day-to-day financial well-being of the schools in each district. Work duties focused on taxation issues, uses of common school funds, and on responsibility for individual teacher contracts.

With the 1960 reorganization of schools in Beaverton, the 13 existing school districts joined to become Beaverton School District (BSD), 48J. The new joint district began under the guidance and leadership of Dr. Herbert Armstrong. He formed three divisions (personnel, curriculum, and public information), each under an associate superintendent. He also appointed a deputy superintendent and an assistant superintendent to assist him. These six administrators guided 20 elementary, 2

intermediate, and 2 high schools with an enrollment of 9,912 students (Varner, 2000, p. 213).

BSD is now a large, urban district with great student diversity and with complex and often competing needs and demands for services. The BSD enrollment has reached nearly 38,000 students (with an annual growth of 700 students per year projected into the foreseeable future). The student population is 47% minority, 33% economically disadvantaged, 16% English Language Learners (ELL), and 11% "talented and gifted" (TAG). Twelve percent qualify for special education (Beaverton School District, 2007, p. 118). The district itself has over 1,800 teachers, 31 elementary schools which includes two K-8 schools, eight comprehensive middle schools, three "option" middle schools, five comprehensive high schools, and seven "option" high schools.

In the 46 years since becoming a unified district, BSD has seen steady growth, a steady flow of constantly changing legal mandates, and changing ideologies about how district-level administrators could improve local school practices. Implementation of federal Title programs addressing specialized needs, from poverty to access of curricular programs, has changed how all schools and districts function. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), American with Disabilities Act (ADA), No Child Left Behind (NCLB), English Language Learners (ELL), and an array of other interests and needs have added to the complexity of running schools and districts. These accumulating and changing mandates have come in addition to changes in philosophy about the best roles for district-level educators to play in the daily lives of schools.

Fifty years later, Beaverton has had only nine superintendents during this time period. However, central office staffing patterns grew and changed as the district grew and evolved, as legal mandates changed and increased, and as expectations for the direct supervision of instruction changed. District-level administration in BSD has expanded to include seven departments (Teaching and Learning, Instructional Technology, Community Involvement, Human Resources, Fiscal Services, Facilities, and Office of the Superintendent) overseen by 31 administrators. The district is further divided into four regions with an administrator (Regional Administrator) overseeing each region. Table 1 shows the direct supervision of programs and schools as the responsibility of one of four regional administrators. Each of these four administrators is responsible for evaluation of programs, building and program administrators, and the direct oversight of schools in her/his region.

The regional administrator is also the primary daily connection between schools and central office staff. Monthly meetings are held, directed by the regional administrators, for each level of schools in the district. Monthly meetings are also held for each region to facilitate the complex needs of each regional structure and to facilitate the needs of K-12 programs. Regular meetings, telephone contacts, and "drop by" support is required from the regional administrator to the principals and is viewed as important in meeting the needs of the many complex program and instructional requirements. However, many of the actual meetings and "one-on-one" talks are more often to problem solve interventions and monitor on-going student progress and achievement specific to each school site.

TABLE 1: Comparison of Central Office Administrative Support in 1960-61 as Compared to 2007-08

1960 - 61

Superintendent

- Deputy Superintendent
- Director of Curriculum
- Associate Superintendent
- Director of Personnel
- Public Information Officer

2007 - 08

Superintendent

- Deputy Superintendent for Teaching and Learning
  - Regional Administrator for Aloha/Southridge Region
    - Director of Special Education Services
      - Assistant Director of Special Education, Beaverton Region
      - Assistant Director of Special Education, Aloha/Southridge Region
      - Assistant Director of Special Education, Westview Region
  - Regional Administrator for Beaverton Region
  - Regional Administrator for Aloha/Southridge Region
  - Regional Administrator for Westview Region
    - Director for ELL Department
      - Assistant Director for ELL
  - Administrator for Curriculum & Instruction
  - Administrator for Professional Development
  - Administrator for Accountability
- Deputy Superintendent for Facilities
  - Executive Administrator for Facilities
    - Administrator for Facilities Development & Operations
    - Supervisor for Maintenance Services

TABLE 1. Continued

2007 - 08
• Administrator for Transportation • Administrator for Nutrition Services
• Chief Human Resources Officer
• Administrator for Certified Personnel • Administrator for Classified Personnel • Administrator for Risk Management
• Chief Financial Officer
• Administrator for Fiscal Services
• Chief Information Officer
• Coordinator for Information and Technology • Coordinator for Instructional Technology
• Public Communication Office

In addition to addressing the direct needs of schools, a variety of other responsibilities are associated with the role of regional administrator as noted on the Division of Teaching & Learning Responsibility Map 2007-08 (Appendix A). The BSD superintendent oversees the level of expectation for the deputy superintendent/s and his/her direct reports with guidance from the BSD school board, Oregon Department of Education (ODE), Oregon State Board of Education, Oregon State Legislature, and specific federal requirements as prescribed by legislation. Thus, responsibilities may be altered to meet the changing requirements from any of the monitoring and involved agencies. Each of these individuals is therefore responsible for delineating and supervising the responsibilities within each department. Functions

related to schools have been outlined as the primary responsibility of the regional administrators and they are primary contacts for all members of the school community.

In other words, the role responsibilities for a regional administrator are many and varied. The regular support to on-site principals who form the heart of instructional leadership can be lost or subsumed under the daunting array of reports to be filed and meetings to be overseen.

Problem Statement

The most appropriate roles of central office administrators are not clearly defined by empirically based research literature. "Actors at each level" (p. 734), as described by Spillane, Diamond, Burch, Hallett, Jita, and Zoltners (2002), of school districts "operate in relatively independent political arenas or 'games,' mobilizing resources that can be used to advance, sabotage, or simply ignore the efforts of actors at other levels" (Firestone, 1989, p. 734). Spillane et al. (2002) outlined the role of actors between building administrators and teachers. The role of principal is seen as one of intermediary between the wants of central office and integration into practice of those wants at the building level. Spillane et al. contended that most responsive principal behavior was defined by the role in which the building administrator desired to define their actions to eventually create their personal history as a leader.

The knowledge gap in this area around what practices actually assist a building-level administrator in advancing the instructional and educational agendas of the school adds to the challenges of district-level instructional leadership. District-level leadership positions are defined and redefined based on the current projected

needs and desires of the current superintendent and the members of the current school board. What a building-level principal thinks s/he needs from a district-level administrator, what the district-level administrator thinks s/he should be doing to assist either the building-level principal or the district leaders, and what the district superintendent thinks the regional administrator should be doing with his/her time in schools can be at least three different things at the same time. Further, Honig (2003) identified the challenges of central office positions to " . . . include managing complex relationships, overcoming turf disputes, reconciling different values and orientations between community and school, and financing new services (e.g., Cahill, 1993; Center for the Study of Social Policy, 1995; Crowson & Boyd, 1993; David and Lucile Packard Foundation, 1992; Rossman & Morley, 1995; Smylie, Crowson, Chou, & Levin, 1994; SRI International, 1996)" (p. 292). Each of these elements is complex, in and of itself, but all are vital to the success and development of working relationships with others. Through the support of county agencies, federal grants, state educational offices, local interest groups, and the resident expertise and interests of each school community, the networking and facilitation of policies is mandatory for the progression of success in our schools (Honig, 2003).

The demands on a regional, district-level administrator are many and often competing. What do we know from empirically-based research that can assist us in guiding district-level "mid-managers" to make the best use of their limited time to understand building-level principal and teacher needs for instructional improvement?

The purpose of this study was to conduct, as a participant observer and district-level regional administrator, three exploratory mini-case studies of elementary schools

in the same district attempting to meet the same district improvement goal, imbedded in individual School Improvement Plans (SIP) during the same period of time in the school year. In order to document how each leadership team identifies strategies to meet the goal, how strategies are implemented, how each leadership team interacts with me as their district administrator, and how performance toward meeting the goal is perceived by key actors in the school this research was conducted as an action research case study. In order to document how each leadership team was progressing toward these goals, leadership teams were observed for (a) communication of high standards for student learning, (b) demonstration of evidence for planning, designing, and implementing plans to meet articulated shared directions, (c) communication of a shared culture of learning, (d) demonstration of the importance of professional behavior, and (e) the use of data to monitor continuous improvement. There are two units of analysis: first, the leadership team at each school site and, secondly, the regional administrator. The underlying goal of the study was to observe each leadership team in action and document opportunities for teacher leadership that further the district and school goals toward greater student achievement for each and every student. I believe these leadership practices at the building level can deliver better instructional practices by teachers and potentially greater gains in academic progress over time.

The reality of any large district is the fact that it is a large bureaucracy striving to meet the needs of students, often from the removed perspective of administrators outside of the school site. The closest line of communication to the practices of 1800+ teachers, 31 elementary principals, and myriad of specialists, may be the role of four

regional administrators and the close connection they have to the leadership practices within each of the buildings.

In the following pages, I review:

1. Prior research on this topic, in Chapter II.

2. Review the methodology and the reasons I chose my methods, in Chapter III.

3. Review the limitations of my research design and what I attempted to do to compensate for design limitations, part of Chapter III.

4. Chapter IV is a report of my findings.

5. Chapter V is analysis of my findings in relationship to the findings of prior research studies.

6. Chapter VI contains my conclusions, and recommendations for changes in practice as well as for future research studies.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

We do not know much empirically about the impact of central office deputy superintendents or regional administrators on schools or school effectiveness. Most research in educational administration has focused specifically on the superintendency or the principalship. There is little in-depth focused research on school district leadership as it is spread across other positions (Bridges, 1982; Crowson, 1987; Murphy & Hallinger, 1986). Yet, every school district has one or more "mid-level" administrators acting on the assumption that the work they do helps schools, principals, teachers and students to succeed. Beyond the roles of hierarchy in the district, the influence of teacher leadership as a vehicle to successful student learning is a developing area of research. Hord and Sommers (2008) affirmed that leadership that is shared and supportive between administrators and teachers both "must be learners, who together are openly discussing instructional problems and exploring solutions to the problems that they identify" (p. 11).

Dunlap and Goldman (1991), for example, in their research on successful school principals described facilitative power, as "a process that, by creating or sustaining favorable conditions, allows subordinates (teachers) to enhance their individual and collective performance" (p. 13). To enhance and facilitate the needs of the building level, not only from the "top down" perspective, typically principal to teacher to student, this same notion of influence may be fostered by central office

leadership through first hand observation and conversation, and provide support for building level initiatives.

Due to the increased knowledge base and expertise of teachers and administrators, the sophistication level of each has added significant new depth to the school organization (Dunlap & Goldman, 1991). This same level of "sophistication" that Dunlap and Goldman spoke of influenced the type of central office administrators who have been trained and have filled leadership roles over the past decade. Specific interest and training has led to higher levels of certification and specialization by teacher.

In a subsequent follow-up study of 16 schools where leaders successfully used facilitative power, Goldman, Dunlap, and Conley (1993) identified six leadership behaviors of leaders of successful leadership teams: (a) acquiring of resources needed for a specific project or teacher, (b) creating synergy between people and programs, (c) monitoring and networking, (d) distributing information at key moments in decision processes, (e) lobbying, and (f) modeling behaviors. They also documented "readiness to change" as a central developmental variable necessary for successful implementation of a new goal by school teams.

Being a respected instructional and leadership coach at the school site has not always been the historical role of a superintendent or of central office administrator in American society. Superintendents from 1860 and well into the 20th century were mostly individuals who characterized the values and religion of their immediate community and were not necessarily grounded or practiced in educational pedagogy or business management. They were not even necessarily graduates from high school

(Tyack, 1976). Their role was to "watch over" the teachers to make sure they behaved according to current moral codes; it remained constant throughout the country through the turn of the 20th century, with the exception of the majority of city superintendents. Beyond a group likeness to their rural counterparts (middle aged, male, white, Protestant, native-born, of rural origins), (Tyack, 1976, p. 264), many city administrators had prior experiences in education as teachers and had "worked their way up" to the position of superintendent, often having fulfilled roles of principal and assistant superintendent along the way. However, the roles of even these city superintendents varied greatly depending upon the opinion make-up of board members and the personal aspirations of the individual. Tyack (1976) highlighted that "some were clerks in function as well as in name. Some were really head teachers, people who inspired and guided the staff and concentrated on classroom instruction. Others saw the job as comparable to that of drill sergeant or inspector general who certified rigid compliance with rules and regulations" (p. 261).

By 1933, only 12% of city superintendents had actually been brought up in cities with a population greater than 100,000 and had experienced a similar educational background to the ones they were overseeing as superintendents. The majority of superintendents were still raised in smaller communities of less than 10,000 people (Tyack, 1976, p. 267). They were still predominantly middle aged, male, white, Protestant, native-born, and of rural origins.

The primary role of these superintendents and central office subordinates focused on management of budget, management of facilities, and evaluation of teachers as to whether they were "good employees." Evaluation of teachers

concentrated on loyalty, neatness, punctuality, tact, management of paperwork and effective discipline (Tyack, 1976, p. 270) versus the instructional effectiveness of a teacher. Through the first half of the 20th century, the ultimate responsibility placed on superintendents by boards was the role of guardian of decorum and morality of staff (p. 273).

Not until the mid-20th century did a change begin to occur in the organization of school districts. Pressures were high to have districts assimilate practices of "business management" and concentrate on the "outputs" of education. Division by functions began to evolve (i.e., guidance, attendance, vocational), and also the creation of research and planning departments began to happen in larger districts (Tyack, pp. 275-276). For the most part, this slightly expanded central office structure remained throughout the 20th century and into the 21st century. Additional departments have developed in the last 50 years, as mandates for specific populations of students have increased, but the support structures and lines of reporting to the superintendent has remained relatively constant. Absent in this evolution of school district management was an empirical understanding of the effectiveness of school leadership who oversaw divisions or departments and who certainly added to the integrity of the organization and the superintendency in general. Specific changes came about because of perceived needs for increased management, and success happened because of the skills and learned experiences of particular individuals. These changes continued to be instituted from a superintendent level and not a school practitioners understanding.

Research that has concentrated on the effects of district-level administration has largely concluded that district-level implementation of strategies has helped to

promote instructionally effective schools (Purkey & Smith, 1983; Finn, 1983; Clark, Lotto, & Astuto, 1984). Providing flexible budget authority, establishment and support from the district during the adoption process, and specific, targeted support by district level personnel is essential during the adoption cycle (Clark et al., 1984, p. 53). Simply providing verbal support will not effect change or support change efforts at the school level. Purkey & Smith (1983), proposed that districts allow planning to occur from the school to upper levels. Finn (1983) supported the same initiative by allowing flexibility in teaching, learning and school level organization versus system-wide mandates. In combination, these supports from district level administrators provide a necessary balance for school personnel and inform central office administrators of progress and on-going needs.

Another area of influence as noted by Murphy, Mesa, and Hallinger (1984) confirmed that the creation of practices and policies by central office administrators has promoted educational improvement in schools. District office personnel who take on a more active approach to instructional leadership at school sites, beyond the traditional role of working with site managers demonstrate greater instructionally effective schools (Murphy et al., p. 2). Combined with efforts of system-wide monitoring of student progress, staff recognize the importance and emphasis of student achievement.

Contrasting this belief, Crowson (1987) stated that "the activities of management seem to be only marginally related to the production activities of schools" (p. 58). Peterson (1999), in his research of the relation between school district central office power and student performance contended that, when central offices are

involved in decision-making related to schools, more harm than good is done to students. He argued that with a reduction of involvement from central office leaders, performance of students may actually improve.

Honig (2003), in a study of building district policy from school-level practices stated that "central office staff" generally appeared in the background of school studies or, bluntly, were perceived as interfering with the progress of educating children. Crowson's (1987) findings highlighted the arguments of March (1978) about the various reasons why a lack of knowledge exists on this topic.

> . . . in pointing out that superintendents have tended to be (a) gray personages demographically, and, "on the whole, rather ordinary"; (b) organizationally insular, involved for the most part in executing a large number of mundane details that add up to making a bureaucracy work; and (c) short-lived administratively, in that most superintendents have only one superintendency and spend "most of their working lives doing something else" (Crowson, 1987, p. 49).

Although dated in their findings, the same reasons may exist in the current review of literature and the reasons why research is limited in this area nearly three generations later. Honig (2003) found, like her colleagues, that district office administrators demonstrated a weak track record of implementing public policy and developing relationships with schools that could have furthered collaborative decision-making (e.g. Malen, Ogawa, & Kranz, 1990; Spillane, 1996). Both Spillane (1996) and Malen et al. (1990) determined in their research of district level authority and state policy that there was a significant weak link between district-level administrators and how they have responded to state policies regarding staff development, curriculum development, and instructional supervision. "Case studies of central office administrators operation as so-called school support providers typically

feature central office administrators helping schools implement district central office decisions not schools' own decisions (e.g., Elmore & Burney, 1997)" (Honig, 2003, p. 298). Honig further explained that past practice of central office administrators as ignoring or "fail(ing) to act on site knowledge" (p. 320).

Weiss (1995) and Honig's (2002) findings highlighted that the typical collaborative policies instituted in school systems by central office administrators have been based on limited knowledge and have lacked first-hand experiences of local schools. The "bottom-up" initiatives have worked to change this perspective in school systems developing more "supportive rather than traditional regulatory or control relationships, with school principals and other neighborhood leaders to advance decision and actual activities of the school community" (Honig, 2003, p. 294).

Leithwood, Leonard, and Sharratt (1998) found similar results when district level structures allowed for building level influence and decision making for both district and school related issues. A major factor for consideration with these collaborative models was time and ample opportunity for input and response by all stakeholders in the organization.

Honig's (2003) main emphasis was to understand the opportunity for influence by school level practitioners and local agencies in influencing district wide policy. Concentration by Honig on school-community partnerships provided a chance for new ways of thinking about schools and agencies, and the role central office administrators could play in furthering success in area schools. Her analysis of this study demonstrated two main areas: (a) Central office administrators' roles mirror basic activities outlined by organization learning theory and (b) central office administrators'

capacity for these new roles includes some conditions predicted by organizational learning theory and new forms of capital--particular knowledge, social/political ties, and administrative tools. (Honig, 2003, p. 294)

Providing the opportunity to create policy at the district level through collaboration provided central office administrators first-hand knowledge of the needs of schools through the school-community based partnerships (Honig, 2003).

The premise of Honig's work was to look at new ways in which central office administrators need to work differently to search for and use information to specifically drive policy forward to support schools. In the process of these partnerships, the central office administrator's knowledge of programs and schools, and the needs attached to these partnerships, influenced the decision making of senior central office staff. Honig (2003) also noted that, even if a positive outcome was not achieved, the knowledge gained and relationships established were not wasted in the process. "Central office administrators also spoke about the importance of systems knowledge--knowledge about the rules and procedures of the district central office and other governmental agencies--to their ability to use or to help other central office administrators to use site knowledge to develop central office policies" (Honig, 2003, p. 320).

Workload of the central office administrators played a pivotal role in their ability to search for information and remain actively involved in these partnerships. To accurately understand and capture information, central office administrators reported the need to spend considerable time engaged with site directors (Honig, 2003).

Findings from Leithwood et al. (1998) led to similar outcomes of involvement by central office administrators by utilizing a myriad of strategies for engagement including newsletters, workshops, and informal and electronic forms of communication. "Especially influential were workshops and mentoring programs, and specific change initiatives designed to assist in achieving district goals and priorities. Strategies that buffered schools from excessive turbulence or pressure from the community were identified as helpful for learning as well" (Leithwood et al., p. 262).

With the beginnings of this evidence gathered by researchers that district-level leaders can play a positive role in school-level change, and with the knowledge gained about potential successful roles and behaviors that central office administrators can use to assist school leadership teams, the research conclusions from Dunlap and Goldman (1991), and Goldman et al. (1993), may play a pivotal role in documenting the facilitation and development of central office administrator roles. "Instead of trying to lead by controlling all events, leadership can be by increasing the capacity of others and by minimizing controlling acts. Instead of most of the administrator's time and energy being focused on control, most of it can be focused on facilitation of others' knowledge, talents, and expertise" (Dunlap & Goldman, 1991, p. 22). In addition, Dunlap and Goldman spoke to the decentralization of power and "enlarge[ing] the decision-making process by incorporating more involvement by more actors" (p. 23). The opportunity to look at the role of a central office administrator through the lens that Dunlap and Goldman portray, may prove distinctly advantageous to school systems.

Their work built upon the early learning organization theories of Argyris and Schön (1985) and Senge's *The Fifth Discipline*, published in 1990. While these works on organizational learning theory could be extrapolated to fit the "middle management" of any generic organization, neither directly addressed the instructional role for district-level administrators that remains firmly embedded in the larger administrative and managerial context of schools, employees and districts. The idea of systemic thinking, using team feedback loops, holds promise for successful instructive practices. However, Senge did not go much beyond general recommendations about gaining "personal mastery," encouraging dialogue with team members, using shared mental models and sharing a vision, to specify how these recommendations might play out in a specific case. Further exploration of the teaming ideas in all of the leading proponents of systems thinking in organizations may yield further valuable clues as to what a district-level administrator can do to encourage success at the school level (see, for example, Flood, 1999; De Geus, 1997; Von Bertalanffy, 1968; Beer, 1981; Ackoff, 1994; Checkland, 1981; Churchman, 1968). York-Barr and Duke (2004) highlighted the lack of research in the area of teacher leadership and identify that the majority of research has focused on small-scale studies encouraged by sample convenience. The primary source of information for these studies has been surveys and interviews. Very few large-scale quantitative studies have been conducted due to the difficulty in quantifying teacher leadership variables.

York-Barr and Duke (2004) outlined a myriad of definitions of teacher leadership as they have appeared in research studies by leading researchers. Theories

have developed as new understandings of teacher leadership have been studied and investigated. Highlighted by York-Barr and Duke (2004, p. 260).

Leithwood and Duke (1999) stated:

> It is important to be clear from the outset that what has been learned about leadership in schools over the century has not depended on any clear, agreed-upon definition of the concept, as essential as this would seem at first glance. (p.45)

York-Barr and Duke (2004) acknowledged that the same is true for teacher leadership in current research findings.

York-Barr and Duke (2004) reviewed literature covering 20 years of research on teacher leadership and synthesized the outcomes of this research and identified the lack of a well defined, conceptual or operational framework of teacher leadership. Silva, Gimbert, and Nolan (2000) defined teacher leadership as (a) formal or traditional roles of department chairs, (b) instructional expertise, and (c) helping to develop new cultures in schools (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 260). Childs-Bowen, Moller, and Scrivner's (2000) closely relates to Silva et al. (2000),

> "We believe teachers are leaders when they function in professional learning communities to affect student learning; contribute to school improvement; inspire excellence in practice; and empower stakeholders to participate in educational improvement (Childs-Bowen et al., 2000, p. 28)." (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 260)

Crowther, Kaagen, Ferguson, and Hann (2002) tied the teaching and learning of the school together with the community and overall improvement for quality of life for both youth and adults (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 260). Pellicer and Anderson (1995) defined instructional leadership as:

> " . . . the initiation and implementation of planned change in a school's instructional program, supported by the various constituencies in the school, that results in substantial and sustained improvement in student learning" (Pellicer & Anderson, 1995, p.16). They then suggest that instructional leadership "does not necessarily begin and end with the principal. Rather instructional leadership must come from teachers if schools are to improve and teaching is to achieve professional status" (Pellicer & Anderson, 1995, p. 16). (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 261)

Wasley (1991) spoke of teacher leadership through the lens of improved student success and teacher experimentation and reflection (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 261). Fullan (1994) described teacher leadership as encompassing multiple domains of commitment and knowledge. Specifically identifying, "moral purpose and continuous learning and knowledge of teaching and learning, educational contexts, collegiality, and the change process" (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 261) as components combining together to define teacher leadership.

Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliott and Cravens (2007) investigated a framework that encourages a school climate for student learning and also promotes the ability of teachers to teach to necessary skills (p. 2) through their own research. Goldring et al. researched six components to base their framework, (a) high standards for student learning, (b) rigorous curriculum, (c) quality instruction, (d) culture of learning and professional behavior, (e) connections to external communities, and (f) systemic performance accountability. To further understand the impact of the specifics of this research, the focus in this study is on communication of high standards for student learning, culture of learning and professional behavior, and systemic performance accountability. These three areas were selected because of the type of work that is required to deliver outcomes. To meet the challenges of high standards, learning and

professional behaviors, and performance accountability, each of these typically requires a broader perspective than one teacher acting alone, and a greater reliance on a team made up of teachers and a principal. Based on the research by York-Barr and Duke (2004), Goldring et al. (2007), closely aligned with Childs-Bowen et al. (2000) belief of teacher leadership as developing in collaborative and professional activities.

High Standards for Student Learning

Goldring et al. (2007) articulated the need for a clear understanding of the roles in a school directed at the academic and social learning expectations for students. An alignment to school improvement goals for each individual and team is imperative to delivering high standards for all children. Strong evidence has been linked to the overall leadership of schools and the purpose and mission of the school (Bamburg & Andrews, 1990; Hallinger & Heck, 2002; Murphy, Elliot, Goldring, & Porter, 2006). Most often this role has been reserved for the principal to ensure expectation and alignment. A review of school goals by Goldring et al. (2007), back to the 1970s exemplified a high level of school goals not related to student learning. Goldring et al. specify that high standards are (a) expected by all staff, (b) set to "world-class" levels, and (c) apply to each child, not a select few.

Valli and Buese (2007) identified that to deliver on this expectation has become increasingly more difficult with high stakes policy directives and student assessment outcomes. The difficulty on delivering on these high level standards are the directed pedagogies handed to teachers that may be at odds with their own beliefs and vision of how to best instruct students.

Culture of Adult Learning

Leadership has focused more on assisting and coaching "from the side," the current ideas about distributive leadership have a more "top down" focus. The practice of distributive leadership goes beyond the simple division of responsibilities and is shared among a wide variety of leaders in school districts (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 1999).

A recent review of the literature identified many "blank spots" (i.e., shortcomings of the research) and "blind spots" (i.e., areas that have been overlooked because of theoretical and epistemological biases) in our understanding of leadership (Hallinger & Heck 1996a; 1996b; Heck & Hallinger 1999). These authors argued that, "an important blank spot concerns in-depth description of how principals and other school leaders create and sustain the in-school factors that foster successful schooling" (Spillane et al., 1999, p. 2).

To lead an organization, most individuals need to understand and embrace the shared vision and feel empowered to take initiative. As an outcome of Spillane, Camburn, & Lewis's (2006) Distributed Leadership Study of 13 K-5 and K-8 schools in Chicago Public Schools, individuals in formal and informal positions share leadership responsibility and develop a working understanding of philosophy and practice as it relates to their direct assignments. Formal appointment of leadership has been traditional through the role of a principal, but the opportunity for teacher leadership helps to potentially fill the gaps in knowledge of designated leaders and helps to further the working knowledge of a group. This, in turn, will contribute to the

overall goal and vision of a district. Commitment throughout the hierarchy of a school district to the vision is important and recognized as a leading factor in change (Mulford & Silins, 2003; Woods & Woods, 2004). Woods and Woods (2004) emphasized the need for "realization of the vision and strategy--the skills and qualities necessary to serve the goal of constant improvement as monitored by performance measures" (p. 648). Mulford and Silins (2003) stated that "leadership contributes to organizational learning, which in turn influences what happens in the core business of the school--the teaching and learning" (p. 183).

Hill and Ragland (1995) emphasized a wide array of desired skills by all individuals in a school organization that include problem analysis, information collection, interpersonal sensitivity, motivating others, and public relations--as opposed to "the lone ranger, all knowing, iron fist, this is mandatory in-service, isolated kingdoms" behaviors (p. 46).

The capacity for central office administrators includes the ability to have site knowledge and an understanding of organizational systems. The combination of this capacity allows for site-by-site support from a central office position (Honig, 2003). Ylimaki (2006) acknowledged the need for clarity early in the change process so that all individuals in the organization have an understanding of the direction of the vision. To fully develop this vision will entail time, but will warrant significant understanding and movement toward the goal by all members of the organization (Honig, 2003; Leithwood et al., 1998). Ylimaki (2006) wrote, "According to Arrien (1993), when people [educational leaders] exhibit the visionary archetype, they remember who they

are and bring their authentic selves forward. The visionary maintains authenticity by telling the truth without blame or judgment" (Ylimaki, 2006, p. 628).

One of the greatest tools of a central office administrator in providing leadership, is to seek information about school practices and develop conduits to support school based activities via policy implementation and resource allocation (Honig, 2003). A significant finding in Honig's work with the Oakland Public schools was that implementation of any new practices in the district needed to rely heavily on the ability of central office administrators to develop strong relationships and they themselves embody "boundary spanning roles" (Honig, 2003, p. 316). Risk taking by these central office administrators was found to be a strength and need to move the district forward and gain greater capacity in (distributive) leadership and vision. Spillane et al. (2006) spoke of "situations involving collaborated distribution" (p. 68), when two or more individuals are functioning in leadership roles and may virtually be pursuing two different perspectives but may benefit from this shared leadership experience.

Goldman et al. (1993) highlighted the effect on some teachers when there is a shared responsibility and collaboration of school vision and the effect it had individually for teachers in their work environment (pp. 83-84). Glickman (1989) outlined a conceptual change of leadership as a principal being the sole instructional leader to the "leader of instructional leaders" (p. 6). Ultimately having influence over one's own work is a powerful and energizing tool and a mechanism to building a school-wide professional community.

Professional Behavior

Being able to adequately articulate the needs and desires of sites is highly dependent upon the lines of communication and the ability to use them successfully to ensure development of practices to support schools (Honig, 2003). Murphy and Hallinger (1988) have also noted that "a significant degree of coordination [is needed] between district and school goals [in order to maintain] a high level [of] district-directed consistency within and between schools in their approaches to instruction and expectations for student learning" (p. 177).

The key factor in supporting schools from a central office perspective in Honig's (2003) study was the level of understanding of building practices by central office administrators, ultimately understanding and respecting the professional decisions and behaviors of each staff. Oakland Public Schools frontline central office administrators reported a higher level of trust with senior administrators and the school board when communication occurred regularly (Honig, 2003). With these lines of communication from schools to senior management, influence on allocation of funding, budgeting adjustments occurred more rapidly, the addition and deletion of budget categories more quickly and nontraditional payment options were supported based on the senior management understanding of site-by-site needs. In addition, senior central office administrators depended more regularly upon front line central office administrators for inquiries on site-specific programs in lieu of referencing more familiar, long-standing practices of the district.

Professional practices improve through the behavior of teachers interacting, sharing, inquiring, questioning, encouraging, and influencing one another for increased student learning and achievement (Marks & Printy, 2003; Moller & Katzenmeyer, 1996; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). "Shared instructional leadership, therefore, is not dependent on role or position. Its currency lies in the personal resources of participants and is deployed through interaction" (Ogawa & Bossert, 1995, p. 375).

Systemic Performance Accountability

Skrla and Scheurich (2001) reviewed school district practices from a deficit perspective of district leadership. For the most part, districts across the nation had been content with the progress of their student bodies given the general percentages of student test scores. Accountability under the federal legislation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) charged district administrators with a new perspective and opportunity to review success for all students. Skrla and Scheurich highlighted four Texas school districts with student populations ranging in size from 8,000 to 50,000 students. One superintendent, from Aldine Public Schools, claimed that he and his central office administrators "would not have looked at the data unless required to by the state" (Skrla & Scheurich, 2001, p. 246).

With access to school data by the media, parents, activist groups, policy makers and researchers, it has quickly become apparent that accountability to standards for all children has not been a significant focus by all superintendents and central office administrators. This study highlighted the deficits of Hispanic and African American children and the need to look at all students equally and not depend

on overall summary scores of students. Superintendents and central office administrators had viewed their schools as successful and reaching the needs of all students because they had students of color as valedictorians and some excelling academically.

District leaders like Donaldson from Aldine Public Schools called upon district leadership to find models of success. Donaldson openly admited that he was not aware of what needed to be done, but depended upon the connections of his subordinates with other school districts to develop plans and models of success (Skrla & Scheurich, 2001). This behavior was similar to the findings of Honig (2003), where central office leadership from the Oakland Public Schools sought the advice and expertise of outside agencies to move schools forward and build greater connections and consistency between central office policies and school practices.

Marks and Printy (2003) found that when principals were committed to reviewing and understanding data alongside with teachers, the level of professionalism and integrated leadership begins to take hold and teachers perform at higher levels (p. 393). Spillane et al. (1999) acknowledged the increased learning curve for teachers to understand data and may have a tendency to take over teacher interactions with regrouping of students for instruction based on the data rather than engaging in deliberations of their own teaching. With regard to the practice of school leadership, Youngs and King's (2002) "findings indicate that effective principals can sustain high levels of capacity by establishing trust, creating structures that promote teacher learning, and either (a) connecting their faculties to external expertise or (b) helping teachers generate reforms internally" (p. 665).

In summary, prior research has told us of some things that district-level administrators can do to assist school level teams in achieving instructional excellence, but many studies have also warned us that district-level interventions can be damaging. Most systems and organizational learning ideas have been built around application in generic organizations, without specific guidelines as to what techniques to apply at which points in time in order to achieve instructional and educational success. Most studies within education have focused on a part of organizational learning, and have not referred the studied part back to an operational whole. Our understanding of teacher leadership is very narrow. Research has borne varying perspectives of teacher leadership and poses questions as to what may motivate and enhance practices, but ultimately we are just beginning to understand the nature and magnitude of teacher leadership on a school and certainly the impact on district decisions and practices.

The reason I chose to conduct this study was because in the gaps in our research-based understanding of the roles that central-level administrators can play in influencing leadership behaviors at the school site level, and to gain a better understanding of behaviors through a systemic look at one instructional goal as addressed in three different schools in one district. My goal was to extend what we know from prior research, but to do so within a broader framework of systemic organizational learning.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Again, the purpose of this study was to conduct, as a participant observer and district-level regional administrator, three exploratory mini-case studies of elementary schools in the same district attempting to meet the same district improvement goal, imbedded in individual School Improvement Plans (SIP) during the same period of time in the school year. In order to document how each leadership team identifies strategies to meet the goal, how strategies are implemented, how each leadership team interacts with me as their district administrator, and how performance toward meeting the goal is perceived by key actors in the school, this research was conducted as an action-research case study. There are two units of analysis: first, the leadership team at each school site and, secondly, the regional administrator, myself. The underlying goal of the study was to observe the implementation of collaboration/Professional Learning Communities and observe the effectiveness of these teams relating with one another, based on the best of what we know about instructional leadership from empirically-based research, and then document and analyze what happens, and perceptions about what has happened related to implementing the specific goal.

It is difficult, but not impossible, to do this type of action research well. In 1983, Schön, then Ford Professor of Urban Studies and Education at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, published an important contribution to the literature of planning theory and practice. He argued that the best professionals, in any

field, know more than they can put into words. To meet the ever-changing challenges of their work, they rely on improvisation learned in practice. Drawing on his earlier work on theory in professional practice with Argyris & Schön (1974), he proposed that through "reflection in action" and "reflection on action" that professionals can be taught how to monitor and change their own practices. The theory developed by Argyris and Schön provides a conceptual foundation for action research (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003).

By distinguishing between "reflection in action" as a way of thinking about a situation while engaged in it, and "reflection on action" as a second stage of additional mindful practice, Schön translated Heidegger's (1962) philosophical notions of "breakdown" into activities that can be practiced without supervision and that can be taught to new practitioners to strengthen their future practice. Schön's subsequent publications in 1987 and 1991 laid out patterns for doing and teaching reflective practice for professionals.

Johns (2004) and others have subsequently summarized the research in many fields that followed Schön's (1983) publications. Definitions of reflection have come to be characterized as learning through experience toward gaining new insights and changed perceptions of self and practice (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; Boyd & Fales, 1983; Mezirow, 1981). Johns (2004) summarized reflective practice as having these elements: practical wisdom, reflexivity, becoming "mindful," commitment, contradiction, understanding, and empowerment. He identified writing in a structured fashion as the primary agentic action to accomplish these elements as practice evolves. He argued that it is possible to construct a reflective framework for clinical practice in

order to track how the professional moves from vision and plan, through reality, and on to reflection upon where cultural and personal accommodations occurred. Johns (2004) further argued that this form of evolving "mindful" practice is a necessary match to the desire to build transformative leadership in a learning organization. It is a powerful method for examining and improving the linkage between planned actions, actions themselves, and the relationship of plans and behaviors to achieving desired outcomes.

Action research has been defined as research in action, rather than research about action (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). Action research is done in "real time" where it is concurrent with emerging events and where a sequence of events and an approach to problem solving are set in advance, and documented as reality emerges. An action researcher requires a "pre-step" of setting the context and purpose of the research, setting a process in place for regular documentation and "meta-learning" and then reflecting upon what happens in regularized and documented fashion. The purpose of action research is often to work toward a democratic group process, but action research techniques have been specifically adapted to conduct a reflective practice research process.

There are issues and challenges to conducting research on oneself and on one's organization. First, it is opportunistic research that is site and person specific and, therefore, cannot be generalized to other settings or other practitioners. However, to balance a loss of "objectivity," it can be intentional self-study under academic supervision that can yield a more profound understanding of one's own personal leadership epistemology, of one's school culture, and of how the two interact.

Traditional research approaches collect data with as much "objective" removal as possible from the school and the practitioner. There is study, but it not deliberately "in action" and therefore may not apply to me as an individual administrator.

Instead of a form of ethnography, Coghlan and Brannich (2005) defined "quadrant 3" of their action research typology as the form of action research where the individual practitioner is engaged in an intended self-study of himself-in-action, but the system itself is not the focus of the study (the other 3 quadrants are sorted by group endeavors and organizational change research). They specifically refer to this accepted form of action research as "the researcher engaging in a study to improve professional practice" where the research is acting as a "reflective practitioner" (p.52). Inquiry into personal assumptions and ways of thinking and acting are critical to this type of research process, as is the focus on the researcher's job or role within the organization.

Gall et al. (2003) provided further explanation to the importance of reflective practice in action research.

> Action research differs most from other forms of research in its emphasis on reflection as an important part of the research cycle. Reflection is a process in which practitioners step back from the fast-paced and problematic world of practice to ponder and share ideas about the meaning, value, and impact on their practice. From such reflection, practitioners make new commitments, discover new topics and explore, and gain new insights into the strengths and weaknesses of their current practices (p. 583).

> The increasing presence of action research reports in the literature has been accompanied by growing concern about their validity. In keeping with the interpretivist epistemology that underlies most action research, the concept of validity when applied to action research corresponds to the credibility and trustworthiness of the study's findings. This view of validity is characteristic of many qualitative research traditions. Anderson and Herr (1999) have identified five validity criteria to evaluate action research studies: [outcome validity, process validity, democratic validity, catalytic validity, and dialogic validity.]

> [Reflective practice research focuses on process validity: outlining a process, documenting it throughout, and reflecting back on the process when it is completed.] (Gall et al., 2003, pp. 591-594).

Glanz (1998) laid out a cyclical model for conducting action research. The model selects a focus, takes action, collects data while action is being taken (including recording in an action research journal), analyzes and interprets the data, takes further action, reflects, continues/modifies, etc., until events are completed. Then, reflect back on the action after the action is completed. This is the pattern that I followed in my research study.

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) stated,

> [Action research] allows people to understand themselves better, increases their awareness of problems, and raises commitment . . . it helps you to develop confidence. It is difficult to act forcefully toward some goal when you rely on feelings without data to support your views. Data gathering helps you to plan strategy and develop…programs. (p. 227)

This study is a series of "mini" case studies of three elementary schools in the same school district that are made up of different sizes and demographics. The purpose of these three exploratory mini-case studies is to describe the events related to one school improvement goal while occurring at one period of time in the school year. I tracked my interactions and analyzed how each school team implemented the same school improvement goal. The unit of analysis is the leadership team of each school as a vehicle to focus and demonstrate improvement toward the SIP goal. A secondary unit of analysis is a reflection back on my own leadership behaviors.

Field Testing

The series of questions (five) was tested with nine different individuals. The intent of the field-testing was not to change the core questions but to develop probes that might be needed throughout the interviews. Three of the five questions ended up having probes developed from the field testing to ensure common understanding of the question in the actual interviews.

Selection of Schools

The schools were selected after December 1 when each of the 23 elementary schools that are situated outside of my region submitted their school improvement plans (SIP) for review. Selection process was not completed until the district had received receipt of my human subjects approval from the University of Oregon and a district review committee approved my research.

Three schools were selected, based upon a similar school improvement goal. Each of the three schools are located in the other three regions in the district, and each school represented a different demographic of the community. Each region was separated into regional elementary groups and each of these regional elementary schools were separated by Title school (qualify with 40% or more of students on free and reduced lunch), middle SES (11-39% of students on free and reduced lunch), and high SES (10% or less free and reduced lunch) characteristics. Schools were pooled in each region by category and a school was selected from each category in each region. The three schools identified in each category were compared by number of years a

principal had been in that school, not years of administrative experience. All selections were generated based on two or less years at a site. I chose to go with the least number of years versus schools with higher principal years of experience ranging upwards of nine years in one building. My thinking was not to introduce another factor in building practices, such as years of established practices and relationships. As a district, we have hired and/or moved nearly half of our principals (15 of 31) in the last two years, and I wanted to eliminate that potential confounding variable from this study.

Solicitation of Teams

I submitted the recommendation for the three schools to our district research analyst and an email was sent to each building principal outlining the voluntary nature of this study (Appendix B). I emailed the three principals who were selected and asked each of them to consider this opportunity to participate (Appendix C). Each was willing and they were asked to approach their fifth grade team of teachers and literacy coach to participate prior to my contacting them directly. I received word from each of the principals that they had complete teams willing to participate.

Building Meetings

Initial meetings were held with each of the teams to review the procedures of this study, their commitment to the study goals and procedures, and the timeline was shared (Appendix D). Each member of each team chose to participate and expressed satisfaction in participating given the title of the project. Individual appointments were

scheduled to conduct individual interviews. Dates and times of team meetings, staff development and collaboration meetings were provided to everyone.

Interviews

Interviews of the staff, principal and parents were conducted at each of the sites. Each interview lasted between 15 and 30 minutes; the time was driven by the extent to which an individual chose to answer each question. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed using pseudonyms (Appendix E). Each participant's transcription was forwarded to them for review and they were offered an opportunity to add additional content to their answers at the end of the transcription. They were instructed that no changes could be made to the existing transcription. I used two independent coders to code the interview transcripts for themes, using the constant comparative coding method.

Observations

Observations were conducted of collaboration team meetings, data team meetings, staff development activities, and staff meetings aligning with the goal. I also used an independent coder to review my action research journal for themes. An observation checklist was maintained for each observation and the independent coders coded those lists for common themes as well (Appendix F). Identified themes and patterns were compared across data sources by the two independent coders, and re-coding occurred until high inter-rater reliability was achieved.

Extant Data

Extant meeting and other written materials were collected as evidence of alignment to school SIP plans. Triangulation has occurred in two ways. First, by conducting interviews with the school principals and school staff, I have multiple views of the school goal at the beginning of the implementation period and at the end. I am able to compare these views to each other and to my own observations and opinions. Secondly, by utilizing regular observations, interviews, and document collection, I was able to triangulate data sources as well.

Limitations of the Design

The primary strength of action research and reflection in practice is also the primary limitation of this process as research method. This is a "first hand" process, where the researcher is an active participant in the process and is, therefore, biased about the outcomes and also intends to bias the outcomes by his own actions. I attempted to compensate for this weakness by using multiple data collection procedures, by careful and consistent documentation of the process and of my decision choices, and by using different independent coders of all data sources as a check against my biases. I believed that what I could learn about different school leadership teams and what I could learn about my own leadership behaviors would more than offset the fact that this was action research about one topic during a limited time period. My intent has been to write the dissertation in sufficient depth of detail that another researcher, interested in conducting a similar study, can follow what I did at

each step of the research process and make independent decisions about how the process might apply in a different situation.

CHAPTER IV

REPORT OF DATA

In Chapter II, I highlighted the six areas of Goldring et al. (2007) and their research findings. For the purposes of this study, I focused on three of the six areas of Goldring et al., (a) Communication of High Standards for Student Learning, (b) Culture of Learning and Professional Behavior, and (c) Systemic Performance Accountability. These three areas were selected because of the type of work that is required in order to meet desired outcome goals. I did not select rigorous curriculum due to the multiple variances that may have occurred with supplementation by teachers, quality instruction due to time restraints to adequately observe teachers in their classrooms, or connections to external communities because of the small scale of this research study and limited influences these may have had on three different communities. To meet the challenges of high standards, learning and professional behaviors, and performance accountability, each of these three areas typically requires a broader perspective than one teacher acting alone, and a greater reliance on a school site team made up of teachers and a principal. To address the framework of high standards, principals, and teachers were asked to address this area by sharing how their Professional Learning Community (PLC), or grade level team, communicated high standards for student learning.

The second area regarding the culture of learning and professional behaviors was separated into two distinct questions. I asked participants if they felt they had a

shared culture of adult learning in their school and, if so, to describe it for me. In addition, I asked how a culture of professional behavior was emphasized in their school. Finally, the third area of accountability was also broken into two questions to address data used regularly to monitor for continuous improvement and then to describe the types of activities each administrator or teacher participated in to design, plan, and implement goals to maximize student academic and social learning.

Each of the themes were counted using simple counts to track similar responses throughout each of these areas. The themes articulated in this chapter had the greatest frequency by informants. Several examples will also be provided that did not have a high frequency count but will be explained as to why this information was provided and relevant to the topic.

Communication of High Standards for Student Learning

From this question came five distinct themes listed by frequency by most referenced to least referenced. These themes include: (a) trust; (b) formal school structures of communication such as team meetings, committees, data teams, staff development, PLC's, and staff meetings; (c) informal opportunities for communication; (d) barriers of time; and (e) parent/student communication.

Trust

A significant theme throughout each of the interviews was the necessity of established trust in relationships, " . . . a challenge that often times we over look," as

noted by a principal. The need to ensure that trust has been established allows for deeper analysis when issues arise, a willingness for risk taking when necessary, and holding an honest perspective of each individual's work in an atmosphere of support and high standards. "I think you have to communicate at a level that is meaningful and I think getting to that level, [is] sometimes harder than we may anticipate." Another individual stated, " . . . people need to feel that they can throw stuff out there and in fact there's not going to be retribution, you're not going to come back and be vindictive in any way."

Two principals and two teachers made comments regarding new leadership in the building and the need for time to establish trust. Each of the three schools has experienced new leadership in the last one to two years. At one school, the current principal is the fourth in three years. Nearly each of the five informants on this fifth grade team made a comment on establishing levels of trust over time.

The issue of trusting one another enough to stay focused on achieving high standards of instruction was related to the value of multiple perspectives for these professionals. The value of multiple perspectives was mentioned by one teacher as being able to "focus on instruction, learning and bringing other parts of the team . . . [together] because that's a big part of it [communicating] with ESL and Title I." Another teacher summarized similar thoughts as "a foundation of support . . . it's not a competitive world so we're not finding out who's doing what and who's not doing what, but it's . . . how can I help you and support you in a new learning situation if you need that?"

Trusting communication was a significant area of feedback from principals and teachers. Various structures exist to ensure communication is happening and the appropriate messages are being relayed. A teacher summarized school communication as follows,

> This staff is really vocal and everybody is very good at communicating with each other and so we have a couple groups that are in charge of making sure that we are . . . facilitating the conversations the right way or going about them the right way. We have started with the basics--our grade level teams, and then our team lead shares back with the leadership team which is the team leads and *(principal name)* . . . and [the] *(reading coach)*. We go back, they share our voice and then from there . . . they share back to us if we had questions or concerns about something.

Other structures of communication exist in different buildings to meet the needs of that school community, "without trust of each other to deliver on what we say we will, you've got nothing."

> Every team, every grade level team meets every six weeks and in the middle of that we meet with lit coaches and myself in between that, so every three weeks, to talk about our last meeting. What we need to improve, where we need to . . . be at [and] what we need to be looking at. And it's down to the teacher and the kid level, what we need to do.

Throughout the interviews trust was a significant element of establishing communication about high standards for student learning. Informants frequently mentioned time for development of natural, trusting relationships. The need and desire to establish trust before engaging in conversations about teaching practices and/or observing one another with their students was imperative.

Formal School Structures of Communication

All of the principals and teachers also noted the value of the formal structures to the school environment: "[staff development] provides opportunities for that [understanding research] to happen because they don't happen very well necessarily in team meetings." The majority of teachers commented on the value of planning at the beginning of the year during inservice week, " . . . when we're planning we're making sure that we are meeting . . . standards." The on-going opportunity for staff to gather was commented on positively by several teachers to address the daily needs of instruction.

> I think as far as the whole school goes, we are fortunate to have . . . a lot of conversations whether it's a staff development day or it's a staff meeting and we're talking about StoryTown and how we're going about . . . it on a day-by-day basis.

A teacher outlined the process the team utilized during their school provided collaboration time.

> We typically start off looking at a unit about . . . a month or two in advance and we pull out and actually look at the curriculum agreements and the standards on the district website and then go through the state and compare those, find out where the common threads are so we don't have to re-teach. We usually make a list of areas that we specifically need to hit and then from there we look at our content materials, the things that we are going to be teaching from and then plan a unit together so that we are for sure making the connections between the items that we have to teach and then what we already provide for us to teach from those. . . . you look at these three or four standards and find where we are going to hit them or we can specifically hit them and talk about them with the kids making sure we're hitting those.

Several teachers in all three buildings referred to the process above. One teacher commented on the loss of time from last year to this year.

> It was a half day and I think it was an administrative decision, I think we are having more this year than we had last year but they're shorter amounts of time. So, if I had to vote, I liked few, longer ones. I feel like we accomplished more. Just popping out of the classroom for two hours is hard in the middle of the day, it's hard for the kids.

Throughout the interviews comments were made as to the value and need for these formal structures in school. None of the teachers commented negatively about the impact of these formal structures on their planning or the desire to eliminate these meeting opportunities.

Informal Communication

Informal communication as an integral part of school work was evident in 100% of principal and teacher responses. Multiple opportunities for communication about the work in schools were evident in comments throughout all of the interviews. As noted by a teacher,

> Sometimes you get the most information from casual conversations with staff members. Lunch, hallway conversations, or after school chats often produce valuable discussion for what students are learning and how we can take them higher.

Another individual had a similar response,

> I think we do it during our plan time, copy machine, staff room, that sort of thing. . . . There is a bookshelf in the library with a bunch of professional books, . . . I've used it a hand full of times and sometimes you see someone else browsing it and you stop and . . . get into a little bit of conversation about what it going on there.

There are multiple opportunities and venues for staff to exchange ideas, discuss strategies, and gather information within the context of the school. One principal and seven teachers also highlighted email as a means of effective communication. The

principal who identified email as a source of communication only cited it in the context of needing to address a matter urgently with staff, while the seven teachers emphasized email as an integral part of their daily communication patterns. Four of the seven teachers were located in portables and noted the isolation of being in the portables as compared to when they were housed in the building and communication occurred much more easily due to their ability to see one another while in the classrooms and hallways. A principal noted the value of informal interaction throughout the day with teachers, " . . . through our observations and our drop-in visits and things that we see, . . . leaving notes with them or asking clarifying questions later . . . in the staff room." Teachers noted a multitude of experiences, such as traveling together to an in-service, going out for a cup of coffee after work, and catching each other before or after formal school meetings as integral parts of communication to accomplish their work.

Barriers of Time

Several comments were made regarding the lack of time available for dialogue, planning, and data analysis while emphasizing the value of these activities. One principal and three teachers representing three different schools expressed this concern. While most individuals expressed this thought in the context of other meetings, one teacher articulated the complexity of time in schools,

> It is an isolating job [teaching] and so it is hard to stay...up with each other even to know what you're doing and so many times lunchtime just becomes talking about the kids or talking about what you need to do next because everybody's lives are so busy.

Another teacher spoke of the difference in time from one year to the next as posing difficulties to process information appropriately.

> We had more time to share ideas . . . [we were] accomplishing the same amount, like breaking down our Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) scores and looking at where everybody was, but then with the additional two hours we had time to actually . . . spend talking about what we could do and what would actually work. At our very first data team we all walked out of there going I think we just committed to something and I'm not sure what it was. We came back to the next data team and said this is not . . . working. I think we needed the extra two hours to process and talk about it and share ideas, really make sure it was something effective.

The value of time is evident and desired by these individuals. Multiple references were made by informants about activities that required time for discussion and planning throughout the school year. Barriers of time were common in the structure of the school day, but informants had played a key role in developing schedules to help meet the varying needs of each person.

Staff/Parent/Student Communication

This theme is about communicating with students, parents, and other teaching and administrative staff about high standards for student learning. The first place that some teachers discussed communication about high standards was among other teachers about how to make sure each student is receiving every type of assistance possible.

One teacher's perspective on how staff communicate in the building,

> . . . when that [high standards] is communicated across grade levels, you raise that awareness with the teachers on the team. I think also recognizing in collaboration . . . it's talking about individual student needs and making sure that on the student level that they are receiving every opportunity they can to succeed.

Responses varied on this question based on school programs that influenced classroom instruction, such as Title I or ESL, and by specialists such as reading teachers, or resource room specialists at one of the three schools.

At one of the three schools, specialist staff were significantly more involved in team meetings, data meetings, and planning. At the other two schools, specialist staff were consulted but were not an integral part of conversations with staff. Each of the three administrators spoke to the value of having a positive administrative presence in the classroom and providing support and suggestions leading to high standards for instruction and learning. An exemplary quote by one principal suggested the need for visibility and promoted a positive culture for future interaction and understanding of classroom dynamics and individual strengths of teachers, "I think it's being visible too, being out there, getting into the classrooms so that they're not feeling that when you're in there, they're in trouble or you're scoping things out for other reasons."

Overall, two principals and three teachers mentioned the value of communication with parents in several forms, such as email, surveys, and newsletters. Individuals reporting this as important were teachers with five or more years of experience. One of the three principals expressed significant value in sharing information with parents in different venues.

> It's not just shared at the building level, it's also shared at site council with parents . . . and last night was PTO. One of the reports that I give at PTO is that I let them know where our staff development is . . . and what's coming up.

One teacher cited the " . . . important piece is giving feedback quickly to the kids so they can know where their goals should be." This quote served as an exemplar of the

theme shared by multiple teachers and the need for ongoing and frequent feedback to their students in various forms such as written, conferences or group interaction.

The need for frequent communication between staff was evident in one school where multiple students received services from specialists during class time. At this school nearly every class period was impacted by the absence of one or more students for individualized or small group instruction requiring staff members to be appraised of progress frequently. At the other two schools communication between staff focused on planning versus student progress. Communication with parents was most often to inform families of activities or to address specific behaviors of students and was similar in all three schools.

Culture of Adult Learning

The question about the perspective of adult learning seemed to catch most interviewees off guard, and people responded in different ways about what "adult learning" meant to them. It was clear from the responses that the language of a "culture of adult learning" was not widely used in these schools. Several staff stated that the focus as a district is based on student achievement and that seems to be the core of all communication. Students were seen as the learners. While these professionals were reporting good practices of communication with each other, and treating themselves and each other as people capable of learning themselves, they did not see themselves as the learners in this setting. The notion of adult learning was not thought of as a separate element in their thinking. This question about their own adult learning was of interest to each of them when they were able to frame their thoughts

about being a learner as the provider of instruction. Four main themes evolved from this question: (a) district trainings; (b) opportunities to volunteer/decision-making; (c) staff enhancement opportunities; and (d) valuing the perspectives of others as integral to the culture of adult learning.

District Training

Out of 13 teachers and 3 principals, 6 teachers and 1 principal identified district trainings as a main source for acquiring new knowledge and strategies. Two individuals offered their own accountability for adult learning in this context, that "it's personal motivation . . . [and] I personally want to participate in bettering myself," and [I'm] "Facilitating my own professional learning . . . so that I can pass that along to others in my position."

The experience of gaining knowledge through others experiences was also highlighted, "I know *(teacher name)* did a GLAD training that she brought back and shared with our team and I really want to do that this summer." Several references were made to best practices training the district has offered in mathematics and overview classes for StoryTown, a new reading adoption, both of which have provided common language and expectations for teachers.

Opportunity to Volunteer/Decision Making

The chance to choose committee assignments or to choose to participate in professional school activities began to emerge through two interviews. Most staff acknowledged that to have a building run well, everyone needed to participate in

committee assignments to share in meeting the needs of the whole building. Four staff members acknowledged the benefit of the whole staff receiving training and background on topics in which everyone should be versed. Two individuals stressed how important they felt it was to be able to volunteer to participate for either of these types of experiences with regard to their expertise. Both of these individuals have four or fewer years of teaching experience. One teacher with over 20 years of experience expressed this sentiment, "I know we try to collaborate a lot and all of that, but there are times definitely when I would just like the principal to make the decision."

The need to have staff involved in committee work or training is necessary to the success of these schools. Teachers expressed a willingness and desire to participate, but wanted to be part of the decision-making process that had been established in these schools.

Staff Enhancements

The opportunity for staff to participate in experiences beyond the scope of regular committees and the chance to "enhance" their skills was mentioned in the form of book clubs or Critical Friends Groups (CFG's) by three principals and eight teachers.

> We . . . have Critical Friends Groups going and there is always the option to bring student work. We follow a protocol for examining student work and make suggestions for instructional practices in the classroom or instructional implications that will support student learning.

One school reported three operating CFG groups with at least eight members in each one.

The other experience reported by staff that feels that it enhances or has the potential to enhance their work was book groups.

> In addition we have professional book groups started and these will continue through the end of the year. They are voluntary but we have 22 for the first one. That is a great turnout and says to me . . . we are committed to knowing what else we can do as educators to promote student learning.

One of the principals shared this perspective on book groups at their school, "It was really, really good. I got a little feedback from some teachers and people were just thrilled with the opportunity. It's like a foreign world." This principal explained the approach to book groups utilized this fall.

> You need to take some time learning for yourself. So last month . . . I bought some books for the staff and asked, you know we are going to be reading this book as a staff if you want to, it's totally voluntary, it's optional. Everybody, classified staff, certified staff, custodians, whatever; whoever wants to do this, if you want a book let me know, I'll get you one. We're going to start with Teacher Man, by Frank McCourt, who is a foul-mouth Irishman, you got to love him. Then we're going to have an opportunity to discuss the first half of the book, we'll be at the Beaverton library, we went offsite, I said I am going to buy some food for you guys and if you want to come, come. We have about 46 staff members here, we had 43 show up. I was shocked. I kind of thought people would show up, but to have everybody with the exception of some people who wanted to come but couldn't come.

At the two schools where book groups and Critical Friends Groups (CFGs) were mentioned each of the staff members shared a sense of enjoyment and opportunity to participate in these activities. At the third school neither book clubs or CFGs were mentioned other than by the principal for a desire to encourage the implementation of CFGs in the future. The principal did express that the staff had attempted CFGs in the past, but they had not taken off.

Informants willingness to participate in these voluntary activities assisted them in problem solving, enhancing their own skills, and offered each participant insights

into new practices. Whether CFGs or book groups, informants spoke positively of their experiences and the desire to see these types of activities to continue on.

Value of Other Perspectives

One of the three principals and nine of the thirteen teachers spoke of the value of hearing other perspectives and gaining insight from them. This final category, value of other perspectives, yielded three thematic sub-sets of data: (a) teachers in need; (b) problem solving; and (c) staff expertise.

Teachers in Need

Three teachers spoke of situations when teachers were in need of additional support. Reasons varied from being new to the profession to dealing with various circumstances with students. One teacher stated, " [I] go visit and maybe help the colleague that's having the issue and maybe kind of walk through and see if we can help to figure out, maybe problem solve and give some ideas and hints that way." Each of these teachers spoke of assisting colleagues in a similar fashion and relayed the value of insight from colleagues to improve their practices.

Problem Solving

Multiple experiences came from the interviews of teachers and principals working together to problem solve and identify weaknesses of student achievement and staff knowledge. A principal noted attempts in helping to create a supportive culture,

> What I'm working on is getting to student achievement and to really try to build a community where it's safe to talk about what's going well and say how do I get better, how do I say, simply, so I can do some more learning about how kids learn.

Examples of problem solving came forth from both formal and informal experiences in schools.

> A lot of times that involves bringing up individual students in different classes . . . we just really take the time to . . . focus and look at what we're doing as a team to help a whole group of kids and then we . . . arrange some collaboration time.

Another teacher spoke from their experience with data teams where the counselor, literacy coach, principal, and resource room teacher participated, " . . . data team meetings where we sit together and . . . just talking about reading and sharing what we have done in our classrooms, what's working, what's not working and helping brainstorm ideas."

The need for informants to dialogue and build their own knowledge around issues or concerns was evident at each of the three schools. Acknowledgment between informants that others experiences may improve their work or relationships was a stated outcome of these types of informal problem-solving opportunities.

Staff Expertise

The importance of dependence on staff expertise within each school came from multiple individuals and multiple roles. Principals, classroom teachers, and literacy coaches all reflected on the importance of the opportunity to learn from one another. One noted, " . . . pulling in some of our experts on staff rather than bringing in outside teachers; . . . we did that yesterday and we're taking a look at autism, Aspergers, and

ADHD. Our Speech Pathologist did it and it was phenomenal." The principal of this school stated, "one of the things that I have learned here is really once you've given them those opportunities, step back and let them roll with it." Four individuals spoke of the opportunity to gain new training through the district and the chance to share this knowledge with staff directly.

> I am trained to teach SIOP . . . and so she [principal] wants me to do a lesson. And that's . . . like a big deal just because I am really new to the building and I'm a fairly new teacher, but they are strategies that I use in my classroom and for her to give me that kind of opportunity and trust me, I feel like she's really trusting as far as a sharing . . . our expertise in different things that might help other teachers.

Staff were at multiple places in their careers, ranging from the start of their career to 30+ year veterans. A teacher summarized her perspective in helping to develop knowledge on staff,

> My place as a literacy coach is certainly to foster any new learning that teachers are interested in having but not to be pushy about that. I think because you're in an atmosphere where people around you are participating in new learning whether it's collegiate, or you know, getting a new degree, new endorsement, or just attending workshops, those opportunities I think have a positive impact on others. But it's not forceful and it's not competitive which I think is a good positive culture of continued adult learning.

The opportunity for staff to discuss classroom needs and "making their practice more public" was shared, "I think having those conversations and really being clear about student needs raises the expectation of learning." The opportunity to further this learning was stated as,

> There's really healthy conversations going on about what's working in some classrooms and those data teams and so other teachers don't feel that it's risky to try it because maybe someone who's more advanced at their teacher level has done it before, they offer to go in and observe. . . .

Another individual stated this occurs informally all the time, "I might go to *teacher name* because I know she's just a master teacher at reading for example."

Teaching team experiences were shared throughout the interviews as a strength of multiple perspectives and experience, " . . . I see the other two members [team members] really rallying around them and they split up who's doing lesson plans and one of them is really strong with working with standards and so she goes back and asks the question all the time, is this really what we're supposed to be doing, are we on target." Helping to stay focused on student learning was a significant theme during the interview process, but receiving feedback was a value for several staff as well leading to further development and expertise.

> I think on top of that, making sure that we are continuing to value each other. I know that regular emails and things like that from *principal name*, a note in the box or a thank you really helps to make sure that this is a place where work is happening, and it's productive for students and for staff and we're having a good time teaching our kids with our colleagues.

Two of the principals in this study have several years of experience in administration but are new to their building this school year. Both are facing challenges new to them. The first reflected back to September when reviewing school goals.

> Sure we'll do that, or them saying they only want 75% to be our goal for writing, blew me over and everyone is looking at me like how is she going to react, the people who know me. I'm like, OK, if that's what you guys want, how about if I go and see what the other schools around us [are doing], what their goals are and let's see if we can come within it. 'Cause I knew nobody else was at 75%. But it's having to do those things and giving them the honor, honoring what they think, but also, the background, the leg work, OK, how do I get them to raise the expectations. What that told me is, they're afraid of not meeting the goals at that fourth grade. Fourth grade is really adamant that we had to go to 75% and they're nervous because they think it's all on them, it's all on their shoulders. I had to educate them, you know, it's all of us, it's

> kindergarten through, all the way up to twelfth grade, it's all our responsibility to prepare these kids for the writing test. We did indeed change our goal from 75% to 85%, because around us everyone was between 80% and 90%, type of thing, so they go, lets go in the middle. OK, let's do that.

Similar to the principal noted above, having honest dialogue poses some of the greatest challenges, but may result in the greatest benefits.

> So I think if you can get comfortable enough to have real conversations about moving ahead, I mean really communicating, . . . I think the number one thing is you have to communicate . . . there has to be trust among people. You have to feel comfortable enough that you can throw things out there, you can have discourse, I want people to say, 'Hey, I disagree with you.' So I think to start with, you have to, and I don't think that can be overstated, you have to really be able to have difficult conversations and have conversations where you can really air things in a safe way and that they go places.

Staff expertise was exemplified and spoken of often throughout the interviews. The willingness and desire to seek input from colleagues was mentioned by every informant and highlighted as "a huge plus" for improving teaching skills and knowledge. At all three schools informants relied on various roles for this expertise and were willing to address their needs with administrators and teachers alike.

Culture of Professional Behavior

The question regarding culture of professional behavior was addressed through several perspectives. From these views, four sub-themes evolved: (a) Positive Behavior Support Interventions (PBIS); (b) Specialist Support; (c) Observation; and (d) Modeling Professional Behavior. One principal captured their thoughts as,

> Culture lives class to class in our school. It's class to class, it's really classroom to classroom, it's person to person. I think there are some general norms if you will. I think we should try to model it and I think we are doing a pretty good job because we have pretty good staff in the building.

Positive Behavior Instruction Support (PBIS)

> We've started the PBIS which is Positive Behavior Instruction Support and that I think that made a really big difference here . . . when we started here I was thinking in the back of my mind, hmm, I wonder how that's going to work? And that's made a difference, I can truly say, that the expectation across the board from all our teachers are very similar . . . but I think everybody is on the same page.

The opportunity to align practices building wide was spoken of positively by all three schools. Two principals and three teachers specifically identified PBIS as a school-wide positive impact on student behavior addressed through adult teaching and modeling. As noted by a staff member,

> We have implemented PBIS this year. We are teaching many life skills through our PBIS. We are having monthly assemblies, posters with expectations posted throughout the school, our Otter Notes are visible (the students are watching the pile grow!), there is a cumulative chart noting our progress toward our goal (10,000). Because all staff members have been trained we are confident in reinforcing and reminding ALL of our students of the expectations.

Alignment of practices between all informants was a significant desire for the implementation of PBIS in these schools. PBIS provided a common structure and created opportunities for all staff to teach to common expectations.

Specialist Support

Specialist support represented by English Second Language (ESL), Title I, Resource Room, Literacy Coaches, counselors, and psychologists were identified as a resource to teachers to better understand their practices and gain insights about student learning. Two principals and six teachers identified these individuals as significant resources to their practice.

> The staff feel comfortable enough to say, I know my reading scores are struggling, I need some help. We just put them up there and we go, nope, this kid is not getting it done. We are not saying, I am not getting it done and I can see I am not getting it done, but I can see this person is getting it done and I need to know what they're doing.

The desire by informants to better understand the needs of their children in their classrooms was a driving force in seeking information from these specialists. None of the informants sought out these individuals to deal with a situation, rather an opportunity to enhance their teaching skills and address the needs of individual students.

Observation

One principal out of the three that identified observation as a key strategy for teachers reflected back to a scenario at the start of this school year.

> You could see . . . that this teacher, this one teacher, had moved her kids significantly further than the rest of the teachers. Yet, what we still have on that team is people saying, yeah, but she had a really good class. It's like the data is important, but until we can use the data to say, I need to get better as a teacher. That's where we need to go with the data. It's not until the 'X' team can say, 'What are you doing in your class?'

This same principal then shared the conversation that began to happen by November with the staff by asking, "What does good instruction look like, sound like, feel like, and what do I need to get there? The teachers were saying I need to get into everybody's classrooms 'cause we are really trying to deprivatize the classroom." Two teachers spoke of their regular practice of going into others classrooms to watch instruction and learn new strategies. Both of these individuals have five or fewer years of teaching experience.

Simply, the act of telling or discussing was not enough for informants. The desire to see and possibly participate in another classroom experience drove these individuals to other classrooms for observation and new learning.

Modeling Professional Behavior

Staff responded with similar explanations and expectations on professional behavior. Two principals and five teachers delved further into this topic with emphasis and examples. The following example encapsulated the general perspective of respondents.

> From my point of view, that's the biggest thing that we do. We try and just meet as a group. If people have concerns, sometimes they'll come in here and talk about things and we'll try and brainstorm and problem solve. Primarily it's a team approach. To be treated like a professional we must act like a professional. This includes the way we treat each other, dress, conduct conversations, communicate with one another, and on a larger scale communicate on the building level. We have new teacher mentors to help bring new teachers and new teachers to our district on board. They were able to meet in August and then periodically throughout the year. A wide range of topics have been covered including parent/teacher conferences and report cards. The literacy coach is also available to support teachers in their teaching and learning. Of course the principal, as the leader of the school, sets the tone. It goes back to what was said at the beginning of the blue part [District Code of Conduct]; to be treated like a professional we must act like a professional, including the way we treat each other, dress, etc.

To summarize, the Culture of Professional Behavior comes best from two different staff members, first a principal perspective as this individual worked with staff to reach a decision and exemplifies the technique they involved to get there.

> Trying to do a lot more front loading, having private conversations with people. Like one of the things at the testing meeting, they are used to not starting testing until April and doing all of it in the six weeks that they have in April and May. *Vice principal* and I talked about it, and with the testing coordinators and we said . . . it's just too harried, given how many kids we have

> to get through and so we said what if we started earlier . . . a lot of schools start in January, they said, oh, they will never go for it. I've had private conversations, hey, what would your grade level feel about starting testing in January, how would you feel about that? Some people said, reading would be OK, but math, we really want to wait until the end. I said I can understand that, just kind of checking and putting it out there and so when we did have the meeting, everybody already knew about it and knew that it was going to be a discussion topic. Everyone had already shared their feelings about it and so we were able to just move on, make the decision, what are we going to do, yes we're going to start at the end of February and it flowed really nicely. It took *teacher name* and I three pre-meetings just about that testing situation in order to have this meeting flow where we had to . . . say because they don't understand, they don't see a birds-eye view of how difficult it is to get through; and how we don't want to get stuck like last year, like the computers fell apart and they couldn't use them, and they only got that one chance on paper and pencil.

Secondly, a teacher perspective on a school-wide sense of professional behavior as it relates to all individuals in the school.

> Culture of professional behavior, I think the first thing that comes to mind is being a Title I school and how transparent the building becomes in our situation because so many of us are so involved with what the other is doing. It's a community of caring and compassionate people who really believe that we're all involved in the learning and supporting of all students. You really create a culture of a place where everybody is invested in everything that everyone is doing and I think that's pretty positive. I think it impacts everyone in a good way and to know that you're not alone. It doesn't feel like an isolated profession so much as I think education can feel. There's always opportunity, I think the collaboration model really allows for people to come together to recognize I am not alone, you know, I can talk about things that are really bugging me, I can celebrate things that are going well. And you know that time's coming, every month you know you can really focus in on student learning. It's just pretty transparent and you can't hide in that environment either which I think helps raise the level.

The level of respect in developing and maintaining professional behaviors throughout the school setting was evident. The value these seven individuals placed on professional behaviors assumed a good portion of relationships with staff in these schools. The transparency of teaching has provided these informants the unique

opportunity to build a culture and dependence on one another to ensure the promotion of professional behaviors and learning throughout the school.

Systemic Performance Accountability

To address performance accountability, the choice was made to separate this area into two parts. The first concentrated on specific data sources that were utilized in the school and/or classroom to monitor for continuous improvement. Three themes evolved within this context: (a) teacher judgements; (b) unit assessments; and (c) formal assessments. The second portion of performance accountability was to understand the types of activities that teachers depended on to design, plan, and implement goals to maximize students academic and social learning. From this question four areas developed: (a) collaboration; (b) state benchmarks and curriculum mapping; (c) goal setting; and (d) setting high standards.

Data

Data sources throughout the three schools were mostly consistent with each other. The majority of sources reported as utilized reflected back to district practices and district adopted materials. The three themes that evolved were (a) teacher judgements; (b) unit assessments; and (c) formal assessments. Each of these three themes were a significant part of daily practices for teachers in planning lessons and interventions.

Teacher Judgments

The use of teacher judgment was validated as the primary source of ongoing data and held up as a common practice by three principals and ten teachers. These activities included observation of students, listening to students read, trading papers among colleagues for scoring, progress monitoring, and conferencing with students. A comment by one teacher highlighted this perspective, "My own teacher evaluation, I still believe that instincts are one of the best things that teachers have. I have verified by own feelings by DRAs or by even state test scores . . . assessments in math, even little quizzes I make."

Unit Assessments

Teachers primarily referred to Investigation (math adoption) assessments and StoryTown (reading adoption) as a major source of information on student gains. Within the context of instruction, worksheets, verbal checks and inquiry based learning experiences helped to inform teachers of progress as well. One principal and 11 teachers identified these as practices used regularly to gather data on student progress.

Formal Assessments

Formal assessments were classified as assessments required by the school district and state assessments. Three principals and 11 teachers identified classroom formal assessments as integral to their practice. Of these 14, DRAs were consistently

identified as a significant source of information for teachers. Only two principals and four teachers identified state assessments as assisting teachers and principals in understanding continuous improvement.

To understand the use of data, one principal summarized the use of data as follows, "It's like taking the economy of the US, we made 300,000 jobs. . . . but it's really like 12-gauge data. You are just taking big shots at things. But like here . . . you got a scope and a rifle." No other individuals depicted the use of data in this fashion, but the narrowing of information to inform practices was a focus for all 14 individuals identifying data as a significant tool. One respondent states, "I mean I think we're using it [data] to only to look at kids which is really important, but I think in turn, find ways to look at ourselves."

These three activities provided teachers the opportunity to determine next steps with their students at any given point of their instruction. Several teachers identified the need for immediate and ongoing information to provide the new instruction if needed. The reliance on these practices has moved several teachers away from a dependence on state summative assessments and encouraged more open dialogue with colleagues about data gathered in their classrooms.

Design/Planning/Implementation

Out of the five questions asked in the interview process, this was the one that appeared to be the least understood. Eight of the 16 respondents required additional explanatory probes to begin to answer this question. Four of these then also required

redirection while answering and one required guidance on three occasions while answering to report on the topic.

Collaboration

This area drew 100% support from principals and teachers. Collaboration at the school site with support from the district on a regular basis (every six weeks) was viewed as one of the most beneficial ways for staff to come together and carry out design, planning, and implementation of curriculum and instruction. One school is utilizing this time for the scoring of papers for calibration on one occasion this school year, with plans to move to three opportunities the next school year. Another school identified this time as invaluable to adjust reading groups "so that kids are more appropriately [placed] at their reading level." The value of this time was expressed by one teacher as "It is nice in our collaboration when we try to have as many of the specialists there as possible and also to hear whether or not they see some of the same problems happening in certain kids." The opportunity for informants to have multiple collaboration meetings throughout the year, has allowed for deeper and more thorough planning. Several statements were made as to the depth that teachers are able to go in a subject matter and really do "deep planning."

Benchmarks/Curriculum Mapping

Seven teachers and one principal mentioned the significance of reviewing benchmarks and mapping plans for instruction throughout the year. One teacher emphasized the opportunity to map, "really going deep with something as opposed to

just touching a little bit across the surface throughout every content area." This process was highlighted in the comments by another teacher, " . . . we talk about stuff [benchmarks] before, during, and after, and how is this working, is it not working." The state distributed newspaper on curricular benchmarks was referenced by each of these eight individuals as a valuable tool to stay focused and clear on objectives to be met with students. Reference was made by one teacher that the state standards were posted up in the room where meetings were held and were referenced on a regular basis during these meetings.

Understanding the need to align classroom learning targets to state benchmarks was a significant desire. Several informants mentioned the increase in student mobility and the need to ensure targeted instruction to state standards for all students.

Goal Setting

The value of goal setting was identified by four teachers and two principals as an important part of planning. One teacher identified significant forethought in developing these goals with students.

> I survey my kids and the parents, phone calling . . . up front loading to know where I'm coming from, I talk to last year's teachers a lot, especially the first couple months of school. I look at old report cards, I pull out cum files that kind of thing. Goal setting for the child before first conferences, I have them identify goals both academic and social . . . talking to the kids, listening to them, watching, observing, and that kind of thing . . . monitoring their progress with assessments and informal assessments.

Another perspective on goal setting is approached through GLAD (Guided Language Acquisition Design) designed lessons.

> My classroom is set up as a team. The kids are in teams from day one and they learn from there, in order to accomplish their goal that they have to work together. I will sit down and set some goals. From there, every week I have reflection; we have reflection time in our journals for those goals. . . . write a little note on that at the bottom and I send that home as my weekly behavior check with mom and dad so they know where the goals are.

A principal's perspective on goal setting with the staff was to move them forward with a district practice already in place throughout the district. "You know data teams were not happening, DRAs, they are not on board with DRAs, they are not on board with assessments, but now everyone's on board, they might not be happily, but we're on board."

The opportunity for all informants to pull together goals and address student needs has improved awareness between teachers of the various needs of students. Teachers also spoke of the background knowledge that each one of them brings to the table and is able to assist a colleague in developing targeted goals for their students while incorporating SIP goals into classroom practices.

Setting High Standards

Throughout the questions on designing, planning and implementing, seven teachers shared that setting high standards was the foundation of where they began with their students. "Not accepting less than" is the standard that several people spoke to and modeling this standard everyday.

> If I have a student who is at a lower academic standard maybe starting out than another student, it doesn't mean that I am going to give them lesser materials, it just means that I need to make sure that I am pre-teaching a lot more and doing a lot more in order to help that kiddo meet the goals of still the fifth grade and not just of where they are.

One principal shared the concern that teachers have been reluctant to share test scores, DRA scores or state test scores with parents because of the competitive nature in the community. Teachers have expressed concern to the principal, and " . . . having parents say I want my child back on that test because they're going to exceed by god, so you get them back on there type of thing." The emphasis and goal for this staff by this principal is to share this information about each student but to make sure that parents have a firm foundation of where these numbers are derived. Ultimately, striving for understanding versus the highest score.

The primary role of designing, planning, and implementing came through the ideas expressed in collaboration. The use of time and integral part of fulfilling grade level expectations and moving students to higher standards was essential to the overall planning the team participates.

> The activities that I plan for are definitely all the elements of collaboration and our collaboration is a full day and it's every six weeks so those activities include some form of staff development opportunity . . . Can we find great literature that's supporting this particular subject area we want to address? Those are kind of the staff development things that I can plan for an upcoming collaboration. It's also facilitating other times of that day and so it's making sure there are opportunities to meet with the additional staff members who are invested in these kids, the counselor, the ELL teacher, Title 1 teachers. Also, I do a lot of planning for the instructional assistants because those are essential to the workings of our school and our building but often times they don't have the training, the professional training that they need for what's being asked of them. So I have the great opportunity to give them instructional tools to support what they're doing with kids and also just to fill them in on the latest lingo, the latest talks, what's happening in the building? Other activities include facilitating events outside the school day.

Setting high standards was a major focus for teachers to ensure teaching and learning are happening to the highest standard. This final quote provided a highlight for the equal training and understanding of educational assistants in our school system. While

only one individual spoke to the work of assistants in this fashion, assistants may play a greater role in achieving these high standards.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

In the following chapter, I present an analysis of the three mini-case studies in this qualitative action research study incorporating the data reported by theme in the last chapter. This analysis of data by site is reported using the four frames to align with the results in Chapter IV: (a) Communication of High Standards for Student Learning; (b) Culture of Adult Learning; (c) Culture of Professional Behavior; and (d) Data and Design, Planning and Implementation within Systemic Performance Accountability.

The three schools varied in characteristics, population and principal leadership. For purposes of confidentiality, I will refer to each of the schools as School A, School B, and School C in the description of each one. School A student population is made up of 1% American Indian, 44% Asian or Pacific Islander, 2% black, 3% Hispanic, 54% white, and 5% multiple categories. Total student enrollment is about 870 students at this K-5 elementary school and has a free and reduced lunch rate of approximately 1%; 51 certified and 14 classified personnel serve this school. The principal is in his/her first year in this building, but had six years of experience as an elementary principal in prior years, four in this district and two outside. The community is extremely involved in activities at this school and staff benefit greatly by a very high volunteer rate in classrooms and supervision responsibilities. This school has been in

existence for nearly 10 years and serves a portion of the district that has come into existence in the last 10 to 12 years.

School B is more similar to School A than different, but still has a distinct identity in the community. The student population is made up of 1% American Indian, 26% Asian or Pacific Islander, 4% black, 9% Hispanic, 70% white, and 10% multiple categories. Total student enrollment is approximately 640 students at this K-5 elementary school and has a free and reduced lunch rate of approximately 18%; 40 certified and 18 classified personnel serve K-5 classrooms and two district special education programs. The principal at this elementary school is in his/her second year having served as a vice principal in another district previously. The community is very involved in this established school of nearly 35 years.

School C is one of 11 Title I schools in the district. The student population is made up of 1% American Indian, 11% Asian or Pacific Islander, 9% black, 21% Hispanic, 66% white, and 9% multiple categories. Total student enrollment is approximately 500 students at this K-5 elementary school and has a free and reduced lunch rate over 43%; 33 certified and 16 classified personnel serve this school. The principal is in his/her first year in this building, and previously served as an assistant principal in the district for four years. The community is supportive of the school and maintains a small, but committed volunteer base.

The district is divided into four regions and each of these schools is in a different region. As stated in the methodology, I do not supervise any of these schools as the Regional Administrator.

For the purposes of confidentiality, I have chosen to report findings in themes and not by schools. The intent was not to isolate a school and assume judgment by these findings, but rather to gain an assessment of current practices. By reporting findings in themes, this will eliminate the specifics of a building staff being identified.

Communication of High Standards

Valli and Buese (2007) identified the increased difficulty in meeting the expectations of policy directives and assessment outcomes and the fact that they may be in contrast to teachers own beliefs as to how to best instruct children. My findings did not demonstrate teacher resistance to imposed standards, but an acknowledgement of varying needs in resources. Only one individual referred to these resources directly, but it was evident during my observations that the differences in staff participation at team meetings and the high number of individuals voluntarily involved in meetings around standards indicated the importance of high standards and meeting the learning needs of these children beyond the level of each individual classroom teacher. This quote is typical of how teachers talked about each student:

> . . . just recognizing in collaboration . . ., it's talking about individual student needs and making sure that on the student level that they are receiving every opportunity they can to succeed, whether it's their Title 1 support, the timing that they receive special services, additional services, and kind of thinking outside the box is what else can we do for this child? That comes with students who have many, many needs, but it also comes from students who can succeed but need more.

Goldring et al. (2007) referred to the need for high standards from administrators, but shared that, in their review of school goals, few administrators actually addressed the learning needs of students. The three administrators talked

directly about a strategic plan and actions focused on identifying and addressing the learning needs of all students. The following is a depiction of one of the schools as the administrator said that s/he developed the plan for the year to meet the instructional goals of the school and individual needs of all staff.

> One of the first things I do at the beginning of the year after I have started the SIP (School Improvement Plan), I take it to the staff, have them take a look at it and I work closely with the literacy coach on it. Then I survey them and I find out what kinds of staff development that they think would be appropriate and it's not just in academics, it's in the social as well. . . . First, I survey the whole staff, then I do table groups, and then I put the charts in the staff room and show them how I tabulated them. Then I go back a second time and I want you to rate them top to bottom. Then they rate them and from there then I work on designing a calendar for the year and then I send it out to the staff so that they, actually I didn't send it out, I shared it at a staff meeting so they could see we were hitting the pieces that they felt were needing to be hit.

While the process sounds informal, several staff referred to this experience during the interview process as structured and deliberate on the part of the administrators. During regular team meetings, they also referred to the outcomes of these activities in relation to the school improvement plans and the expected outcomes for students. For example, one of the targeted outcomes at this school was to see at least 75% of all fifth graders scoring proficient or higher in summary writing. This goal would demonstrate a gain from the existing 66% of students meeting this standard. By December, this goal had been met and was re-evaluated with a February outcome of 85% of fifth grade students demonstrating proficiency. Once again, this goal was met and an additional goal was developed to see 80% of all fifth graders increase their scores in organization by one while maintaining a focus on the first goal attained by 85% of students. This meant that a student who had scored a three for organization would be expected to achieve at least a four in this area.

Teacher leadership was evident in the review process, determination of next steps, ownership of the teaching and pushing to learn new strategies from one another. In each of the schools, this was evident in team meetings as challenges faced participants and the desire to figure out new ways to approach each issue came forth.

My findings supported a perceived significant need for communication with all constituents. This included parents and colleagues alike. The communication structures varied from site to site and teacher to teacher, but were an integral part of each person's practice. The fact that 100% of the teachers and administrators relied heavily on formal structures of the school day, such as staff meetings, staff development activities, committee meetings and collaboration time demonstrates a need to orchestrate these experiences and provide the important necessary time for staff to communicate in these processes. As noted in Chapter III of this study, these participants named time as a significant barrier to being able to communicate and deliberate the various needs of students in the school. This affirmed Leithwood et al. (1998) in their findings to support both district and school issues and allow for major considerations of time to build collaborative models and receive input by all stakeholders.

The selection of literature included in Chapter II does not speak to the element of trust among colleagues, but the necessity for trust was evident throughout the interview process and visible during my observations between colleagues. Tschannan-Moran and Hoy (2000) investigated research of trust in schools over four decades to understand the importance, nature, and meaning of trust and the dynamics of trust variables between principals, colleagues, and parents. Noddings (2005)

addressed trust through caring in the classroom between teachers and students and Adams and Christenson (2000) looked at trust from the perspective of home to school relationships at both the elementary and secondary levels. Darling-Hammond (2003) investigated the level of trust that is established through teacher knowledge gained through professional development. The theme of trust is significant in the overall perspective of staff in relation to their work and spoken to frequently in addressing the successful communication of high standards.

Culture of Adult Learning

This was an amazing source of information from the interview responses and watching these professionals in action. Hill and Ragland (1995) emphasized the need for a wide array of skills by many individuals within a school to build knowledge and capacity, versus the all-knowing administrator. Evidence from both teachers and principals was addressed in interviews as they spoke of the various trainings that staff had received. True evidence of these practices came in my observations of two teams as individuals were relied on for their knowledge and expertise for the group. Specifically, teacher knowledge in constructing more effective lesson designs was relied on because of specific trainings that staff had received in GLAD and SIOP. It was not expected that these individuals assume responsibility for the work, but naturally assumed leadership in building greater capacity of knowledge among colleagues. Mulford and Silins (2003) referred to this as "leadership contributes [contributing] to organizational learning, which in turn influences what happens in the core business of the school" (p. 183).

Visioning and the assumption of responsibility (Spillane et al., 2006; Woods & Woods, 2004) for the school and taking the opportunity to lead was evident in the practices of teachers in two of the three buildings in the assumed leadership roles of their Critical Friends Groups (CFGs).

> Student behavioral and academic issues have been discussed which has assisted individual teachers with additional strategies and classroom management tips. The meetings have led to an increased awareness of strategies to use in the classroom to help all students succeed. This CFG focuses on improving uninterrupted instruction for all students and providing feedback for specific students. (Mulford & Silins, 2003, p. 183)

Another group reflected on their experience,

> Student work has been brought into the CFG three times. Follow-up conversations indicate there was a direct impact on student achievement. We have discussed a wide variety of dilemmas and have learned about different roles in the building and how they can work better together as a staff.

A different focus has been steering another group and has offered significant support to its members.

> Student work has not been brought to the attention of the group. However, the behavior concerns dovetail with the academic ones. The group has tackled professional dilemmas and provided alternative for the presenters to consider. Some have chosen to implement the suggestions. Dilemmas are debriefed and revisited as the year continues.

None of these groups in the two schools included an administrator or pseudo-administrator (student supervisor). These groups were run voluntarily, after hours, with no additional pay. Leadership was assumed by different members throughout the year and exemplify the effect of shared responsibility and collaboration of school vision that Goldman et al. (1993) revealed in their study of teacher practices and facilitative power.

The most revealing element from a central office observer was the wisdom that is shared among teachers. From the perspective at central office, administrators addressed staff development from a "cattle herd" perspective to get everyone trained on basic topics of concern. The reality of this situation is very different as the individual interests of the teachers were a leading factor for these teachers as they sought specific trainings and, in turn, shared this information with their colleagues. The "group wisdom" was a far more powerful factor for staff, than any administrative efforts, at ensuring the same training for all staff. Two schools had evolved significantly on their reliance for collaboration time with colleagues and the development of CFGs school-wide. The school that had not evolved as much in either collaboration or CFGs, lacked the same depth and multiple perspectives in team meetings and interview responses, as evidenced in the other two schools. Conversations among team members in this last school consisted of day-to-day business and the mechanics of daily practices in lieu of discussions about improving teaching and learning or specific problem-solving discussions about particular students or classes.

Honig (2003) addressed the need for central office administrators to have direct site knowledge and an understanding of organizational systems in order to interact in positive ways in improving the school. My brief observational and interview experiences with these three teams affirmed this practice. There is a need for first-hand site-by-site knowledge in order for the administrator to function at the level of high standards of instructional improvement and in order to trust and be trusted in the specific school setting. This is not a "life altering" finding for many administrators, but

it certainly has implications for district practices as new administrators are selected and as communication plans are constructed for better understanding of effective teaching and learning practices. This finding also has implications for how central office administrators must spend their days. Immediate ongoing knowledge of what is happening at each school site cannot be achieved by staying in the central office location. Administrators must be in the schools on a regular basis and for sufficient time to be a positive force for improvement.

This district provided time for collaboration of school teams but cannot benefit from the wisdom of these groups without engaging and understanding their work at a personal level.

> . . . as a whole building I would say probably collaboration is the way that we meet more in a way that the building is all working at the same. Do you know what I mean by that? That everybody in collaboration is kind of working in the same scheme of what the bigger agenda is.

The opportunity to observe and listen to these dialogues helped me to provide greater context and immediately informed my decision-making ability at the central office level. Staying in the central office location and reading minutes of team meetings cannot accomplish the same outcomes.

On another level, there had been a situation in a school that had transpired in September where the whole school team was more involved in the running of the building than on instructional practices.

> But going through that together as a team and then also, [principal name] took it then to the building level and we had a staff meeting about another .5 [APU] that we had and where we were going to put 'em. That response made me feel better about the situation, because it was like, OK, well it's being done and she really truly listened to our complaints. It was a lot more professional; there wasn't the closed-door conversations that were happening and different things.

> And so that was a really good change to see both from [principal name] perspective, but also in our staff, cause it wasn't the secretive stuff anymore, it was more open and different things and so, it was nice to in one year be able to experience both sides of that because it was definitely a challenge.

This perspective was important in the running of the building and understanding the use of resources in the school. One perspective may be that this was ultimately the principal's decision, but this staff experienced the opportunity to develop and understand the rationale behind this decision. This takes time, but understanding is of greater value in the long run than the perceived loss of time. The way this process was handled also set a context of trust that emerged in later discussions around instruction.

The belief of teacher leadership as developing through collaboration and professional activities (Childs-Bowen et al., 2000; Goldring et al., 2007; York-Barr & Duke, 2004) was evident during my observations of teacher collaboration, staff meetings and staff development. Affirmation of these observations was apparent during my review of interview comments as teachers and principals described common practices in their schools. To understand the seriousness and nature of this work, the following quote from a building principal captures the sentiment so often reflected throughout my observations and interviews.

> We have a sense of collective urgency regarding continuous school improvement efforts so each and every student can achieve to their fullest potential. In addition, we are committed to building our Professional Learning Communities on relational trust. We will continue to leave no stone unturned as we use data to guide our decision, track the progress of individual students, and collaboratively focus on teaching and learning while we put preventions and interventions in place to ensure achievement for all students.

Goldman et al. (1993) approached school leadership from a perspective of facilitative power as a result of legislative mandates. While the culture of school

administration was evolving and mandates were pushing the lines of authority and process in the early 1990s, teacher leadership began to experience growth and opportunity. In the 15 years since this study, much of the work that we find in schools today was based on this time frame in public education in the state of Oregon. Goldring et al. (2007) focused on the innovative changes that have taken place throughout our school systems. These two studies differed in their approach and purpose but were significantly aligned in the outcomes that are being sought from teachers in today's classrooms. As evidenced by one school's goal, "To hold each other accountable for continuously adapting practices to meet the needs of all learners, share resources and ideas, and support each other in implementing new practices."

Culture of Professional Behavior

In my attempt to isolate differences between adult learning and professional behavior, I found that teachers and principals alike struggled to characterize both in isolation. They are integrated and reliant upon one another in orchestrating the needs of a school. The decision to separate these themes was to determine if they operated in isolation of one another or in fact the two themes operated in tandem with one another. My findings in this area support the elements of adult learning and demonstrate the connectedness of professional behavior in practice. One teacher's response characterized this perspective, "I get to facilitate the collaboration, I get to plan for the collaboration, to simplify in terms of what data we really are looking at." Informants were not able to isolate the difference between adult learning and professional behavior without the combining both themes into one. This was valuable for me to

hear in interviews and also observe in meetings. In chapter two, reference was made to professional practices improving through the behavior of teachers interacting, sharing inquiry, questioning, encouraging, and influencing one another for increased student learning and achievement (Marks & Printy, 2003; Moller & Katzenmeyer, 1996; York-Barr & Duke, 2004), and, in fact, this was true according to the majority of responses in this study. Whether one categorized these kinds of behaviors as adult learning behaviors, or as the behaviors of a professional community, the behaviors of collaboration were pervasive in two of the three schools and present in the third school although at a lesser level. I rated all three schools as having a strong culture of professional behavior.

Systemic Performance Accountability

Good uses of data and data analysis techniques are an acquired skill set. This sentiment was common in the data team meetings by all staff members during my observations. When new insights were shared, and understandings were developed from data outcomes and daily practices, teachers and principals alike demonstrated learning through appropriate uses of data to inform their classroom practices. Spillane et al. (1999) acknowledged that, with the increased learning curve for teachers to understand data, they may have a tendency to want to regroup students for instruction versus engaging in deliberations about their own teaching. I saw this behavior in only one of the three teams that I observed. Data in that team was used for the sole purpose of sorting students into new groups for instruction and then the team turned to planning of outcomes for the unit of study. I was most encouraged with the two teams

who chose to look at multiple sources of data from multiple perspectives and listened to one another as they sorted through the data and speculated about the implications of data findings. Both of these teams focused back to their own teaching. They talked about how lessons may have been designed where a goal was not articulated, or even that the intended goal was not met through the instruction provided. They brainstormed with their colleagues about how to improve their teaching. A sense of personal and school ownership and individual and group responsibility to meet goals were two elements that came from this experience with teachers and principals. The commitment demonstrated by these two principals to understand the data, in particular, exemplified for me Marks and Printy's (2003) findings that the level of professionalism and integrated leadership begins to take hold when the principal can actively engage the teaching staff in data analysis to improve individual instruction. The long-term effect of teachers performing at higher levels was not able to be observed in the short time frame that I outlined for this study. However, the consistent use of data to plan effectively through collaboration and utilize appropriate resources to map the curriculum as it emerged over the time period was an integral part of these team practices and it seemed very likely to me that school teams that regularly check their daily practices against goals, and modify practices to increase performance against goals, cannot help but be more successful in the long run than schools that have no school-wide goals or school teams that do not track goals on the individual student and teacher levels.

A single factor apparently led to the current behavior of the members of the school team where data usage was markedly lower, and was commented upon by three

teachers during their interviews. The high turnover of principals at this site was never identified as a leading factor for any one thing at this school, but was highlighted several times as "current reality." The high turnover of principals meant that there was no consistent instructional leadership for the teachers at the site from the principal. I heard the desire for greater depth of data knowledge and understanding of alternative strategies expressed by the team members but, at the present time, each person said that they relied primarily on their own skill set in their classroom as their guide versus the wisdom and knowledge of the team, or of the principal. Youngs and King's (2002) findings indicated that effective principals can sustain high levels of capacity by establishing trust, creating structures that promote teacher learning, and "either (a) connecting their faculties to external expertise or (b) helping teachers generate reforms internally" (p. 665). This team holds promise for the future, but will take time to sort through the mechanics of working together and ultimately establish trust to investigate existing teaching practices with a new, more permanent leader.

Each of these teams was at a different place in their understanding of data analysis, communicating about high standards, understanding their own learning, and the relationship of data to professional behaviors. I was most impressed with the depiction of one scenario that a principal described that she had faced this last fall in her first year in this building, following high principal turnover in recent years.

> I'm just thinking of what we're working on in writing with Site Council is kind of front loading, they did the research of what we need to do, what other schools are doing who are doing well on state tests in writing and then we took it to the writing committee next and said, here is, like we gave them all the research and then from the research, we pulled out on Site Council all the things that seemed to make the biggest bang for their buck type of thing. Whether it was like explicitly teaching handwriting, um, using Lucy Calkins, I

> mean there was specific programs mentioned, specific books, there was specific time, having common editing works throughout the school and common no excuse words lists throughout the school so those kinds of things. So that came out of the research of Site Council and so then we gave it to the writing committee the same research and pulled out what they thought and then we had each of them, we did it differently, we had the writing committee rate it on a scale of one to five on what's most important to what's least important. Then we did the dot activity with Site Council one red dot, green dot or blue dot of what you think is most important, second most important or third most important.

This scenario depicts the need for communication, establishing a culture for adult learning and professional behavior, using data, and designing, planning and implementing on a school-wide basis. This principal is laying a significant foundation of expectation and plan for improvement for both his/her school and parent communities.

The ability and need to have administrators and teachers function in multiple themes at one time is significant in the day-to-day practices of school. The use and interpretation of data by staff and administrators alike ensure the opportunity for teachers to assume the role of leadership and determine what next steps may need to be taken. The opportunity for teachers to interact, learn from specific situations and take action to provide a better learning experience for children, all without relying on the principal for training or knowledge, enhances the ability for teachers to take action and determine next steps.

Implications of Analysis

The purpose of this study was to conduct, as a participant observer and district-level regional administrator, three exploratory mini-case studies of elementary schools

in the same district attempting to meet the same district improvement goal as imbedded in individual School Improvement Plans (SIP) during the same period of time in the school year. I attempted to document how each leadership team identified strategies to meet the goal, how strategies are implemented, how each leadership team interacts with me as their district administrator, and how performance toward meeting the goal was perceived by key actors in the school.

The teachers and principals in the three schools knew that I was conducting this study. My presence brought awareness of the importance of their work to me, both as a researcher and as a district administrator. They knew from the topic of my study that the district and I value the roles each person plays in the implementation of district practices. A response by one teacher when I asked a question after one of the meetings was, "I am happy to see that the district cares what is happening at the classroom level and not just rolling out another mandate." Another stated, "Having you at our meetings has raised our expectations of ourselves knowing that someone from the outside was listening." The benefit of site knowledge on district practices as Regional Administrator is imperative the day-to-day decisions that are made at the central office.

My new understanding of the practices that teachers are engaging in to inform their instruction is very revealing. In my fifteen years since I left the classroom, the type of information that teachers are able to gather and the opportunities that teachers are taking to gain insight and knowledge from one another is very different than the practices that I engaged in at the classroom level. Teachers rely heavily on ongoing communication about high standards for all students no matter what services a child

receives throughout the school. The expectation of thorough communication by teachers and administrators is imperative to successful work with students. The professional behaviors exhibited by teachers in running CFG's or book groups were an impressive enhancement to the work of the regular classroom teacher. Accountability is a natural part of the work of these classroom teachers. The working knowledge of data that is produced both informally and formally on their students is driving instruction and daily decision on how to best approach student learning. Findings from this study have significant implications to the daily practices of a central office administrator and the information that is accessible simply by observing, listening, and participating with teachers as collaboration occurs at the school level.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Implications for Practice

Implications of teacher leadership may help to raise the level of professionalism that Marks and Printy (2003) referenced with principals participating in data teams, but adding a district component as well. As Dunlap and Goldman (1991) stated in their findings, "Instead of trying to lead by controlling all events, leadership can be by increasing the capacity of others and by minimizing controlling acts" (p.22). Implications from this study could result in changes in how central office administrators gain information on effective practices at the school level and abandon less effective practices. Often in today's current central office typical practice, principals are the ones simply informed of new practices and we (central office) rely on them to share this information and implement change at the school level without our further presence or guidance. Often times not knowing the message that each principal is walking away with and/or how they may relate this information to existing practices in their buildings means that we do not know how our new practice is being interpreted or implemented at the school. The reality may be that our teachers should be the individuals receiving information first hand and assisting in the development of the message to their colleagues and principals prior to moving forward at a district level. The implication of this practice is a paradigm shift for the organization and

certainly a change for the building principals. The threat of this may be perceived as diminishing power by the building principal, but the implication for practice by teachers may outweigh with benefits of practice and direct feedback centrally to support the work of teachers.

Further implications of this study and new practices may lead to more effective budgeting for adoption cycles and relying more heavily on effective teacher generated materials developed over time. Ongoing communication from the different school sites facing specific needs from their student population may provide more effective communication between schools and teachers who may be facing similar challenges. The benefit of shared information between four regional administrators, 31 elementary schools and principals, and nearly 1000 teachers have the potential to improve staff development opportunities based on needs and provide opportunities for shared knowledge across the district. Timely information on trends and needs may alter the length of time central office has taken to respond because principals and teachers may have felt the situation they were facing was in isolation and not effecting other schools.

Observation and awareness of professional behaviors, communication and establishment of high standards, and first hand knowledge of effective uses of data may enhance the work a regional administrator is able to contribute to a principal if difficulties begin to arise or themes begin to develop. First-hand knowledge of school practices may lead to a greater understanding of high turnover rates, breach of trust, union issues and budget implications based on site practices.

The level of knowledge by central office administrators and access to schools has the potential to create long lasting trust and improved practices from central office departments and individual school sites. Established relationships between school staffs, principals, and central office administrators ensure more effective communication, more timely response, and potentially a break down of central office hierarchy.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations to this study that may affect results transfer to another school, to another team within the existing schools of study, or to another district administrator. This study was based on the behaviors and activities of three teams in three separate buildings during a relatively brief period of time around one topic. A different topic or different time period might have yielded different results. School teams change membership regularly. This study provided only a brief snapshot of each of the three teams with a particular history during a short period of time.

This small population was 13 teachers and 3 principals. Their experiences and attitudes may not represent the perspectives of other individuals outside of the existing team structure or other teachers or principals at other school sites. Because I was not intending to generalize these findings in a classic sense of generalizing from a random sample to a whole population, these participants were selected for their roles in the school and because they volunteered to participate and were not selected randomly. What I have attempted to do in order to compensate for the qualitative nature of the study and for the non-random sampling is to make my process and findings explicit

enough in this dissertation for future readers to make their own decisions about whether these findings may be applicable to another setting or school team.

This was a qualitative action research study, and bias most likely played a role in analysis and interpretation of data. I tried to carefully document my observations in my field notes, and I recorded, transcribed, and blind-coded the interviews in order to document my findings. However, because I was also an actor within the district during the study, as well as being a researcher, objectivity must necessarily be compromised. On the other hand, my role gave me access to the participants and the team meetings in ways that an outsider would not have been able to access.

Replicating this study would perhaps result in different findings based on the circumstances of each team and their experiences. However, the findings of this study are in accord with prior research findings on each major topic, including the issue of trust, which I had not planned for in advance but which turned out to align with many prior studies of successful collaborative schools.

Suggestions for Future Research

My first recommendation to future researchers is to be sure to insure adequate time for observation. Given the limitations of my calendar and the daily duties of my position, I would have benefitted significantly by spending more time than I had allotted with these individuals. I would also recommend engaging in classroom observations to determine for myself direct effects of collaboration and data team meetings on a teacher's daily practices, in addition to understanding each person's perspective through interviews. I think that spending more time observing on site and

in classrooms would have added an important additional level of information to this study. I also would have liked time to go back and share my notes and observations with the teachers and the school site teams to see how their interpretations might have differed from mine, and informed by findings. There is significant value in spending time in this type of setting to better inform a district level administrator of what supports are needed to improve teacher practices.

There are several areas of further study that I recommend. The opportunity to replicate this study and begin to understand the themes most prevalent in schools would be very beneficial. I would also recommend that the theme of trust be investigated from the importance, nature and meaning, and dynamics of trust at a school location. This lens may be significant and more telling to the researcher than the areas investigated in this study. Finally, a study utilizing the three strands identified in this study, but at an elementary school, and also a middle school, with teams of teachers who serve the same group of students but teach only a single discipline to all groups. I would recommend this study with the same group of students over a two-year time frame and emphasize progress over time with these students. Greater understanding of the transition that students make from elementary to middle school is significant and a hurdle many districts face.

APPENDIX A

TEACHING AND LEARNING

ORGANIZATION CHART

Beaverton SCHOOL DISTRICT
creating pathways to the future for all students

TEACHING AND LEARNING 2007-08

02.05.08 SB:DO

BEAVERTON REGION:

Regional Administrator:
Holly Lekas
Administrative Assistant: TBD

Diversity: Verna Bailey
Title Specialist.: Sharon Jensen
Title I Asst.: Toni Hinman
Title I Support: Kelly Boswell

Beaverton HS
Arts & Communications Magnet Acad 6-12
International School of Beaverton 6-12
Highland Park MS — Whitford MS

Cooper Mt. Elem — Fir Grove Elem
McKay Elem — Montclair Elem
Raleigh Hills K-8 — Raleigh Park
Sexton Mt. Elem — Vose Elem

Consistent Discipline & Administrator Handbooks
High School Principal Meeting Facilitation
Oregon Leadership Network (OLN)
Professional Development
Resource Allocation Methodology (RAM)
Title I, II, III, IV & V

ALOHA/SOUTHRIDGE REGION:

Regional Administrator:
Carl Mead
Administrative Assistant: Cris Filer

Special Education (see below)

.5 Counseling Specialist:
Vicki McNamara

Aloha HS — Southridge HS
Conestoga MS — Mt. View MS

Chehalem Elem — Errol Hassell Elem
Greenway Elem — Hazeldale Elem
Hiteon Elem — Kinnaman Elem
Nancy Ryles Elem — Scholls Heights Elem

Art Literacy
Counseling
Elementary Music
Elementary Principal Meeting Facilitation
Foreign Exchange Students
Innovations Process Team (IPT)
Interagency Collaboration
Special Ed./504

Deputy Superintendent of Teaching and Learning: *Sarah Boly*

Administrative Assistant: Mary Hawkins
General Fund Accountant: Stephanie Brunelle
Project Support: Debbie Olson

At the heart of the Department of Teaching and Learning's plan for addressing the District's greatest challenge, the bringing to scale of instructional practices that ***"increase academic achievement in literacy and mathematics for each and every student,"*** are the following overarching ***STRATEGY*** and related ***OUTCOMES*** for 2007-08:

The STRATEGY for attaining the District Goal is to bring to scale effective teaching practices through the implementation of high quality Professional Learning Communities (PLC's) for all staff that are aligned with our PLC cycle Standards and provide ongoing evidence of improved achievement results for each and every student in literacy and mathematics.

- **Outcome 1:**
  100% of PLCs District-wide will be identified as "high quality" through the achievement of a proficient or exemplary rating in all five areas of the Standards of Quality Practice Rubric
- **Outcome 2:**
  100% of students served directly by high quality PLCs will show improved academic outcomes on an annual basis as indicated through their achievement result (e.g., the American College Test, State Assessments in reading and mathematics, District approved progress monitoring assessments, etc.)

SUNSET REGION:

Regional Administrator:
Ralph Riden
Administrative Assistant: Leanna Kluthe

Options Specialist: Janet Hogue
Homeless Liaisons: Mary Metheney, Lisa Mentesana
Career Technical Education/
Education/Support Specialist: Sue Irwin
Ruth White, Deer Park Academy
Early College High School: Linda West

Merlo Station HS — Sunset HS
Cedar Park MS — Meadow Park MS
Barnes Elem — Bonny Slope Elem
Cedar Mill Elem — Oak Hills Elem
Ridgewood Elem — Terra Linda Elem
West TV Elem — William Walker Elem

Athletics/Activities (Tier 1-3)
Commencement
College Scholarships
Homeless Student Support Programs
International Partnerships/Programs
Options Schools/Program Oversight/Evaluation
Principals' Steering Cmte.
PAVTEC/Career Technical Education

WESTVIEW REGION:

Regional Administrator:
Brenda Lewis
Administrative Assistant: Val Erlandson

English Language Learners (see below)
Westview HS — Health & Sciences HS
Five Oaks MS — Stoller MS

Aloha Huber Park K-8 — Beaver Acres Elem
Bethany Elem — Deer Park 6-12
Elmonica Elem — Findley Elem
Jacob Wismer Elem — McKinley Elem
Rock Creek Elem

English Language Learners Department
Language Immersion Programs
Middle School Principal Meeting Facilitation
Inter-district transfers/open enrollment
Pre-K/Kindergarten Programs
Teacher Evaluation Program Liaison
Research, Grants, and Accountability Team
Professional Growth & Evaluation Program
Resource Allocation Methodology (RAM)
Instructional Technology Liaison

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TEAM:

Administrator for Professional Development:
Candace Stevens
.5 Administrative Assistant, Laurie Fiebich

Professional Development
- Administrative
- Certified
- Classified
- New Teacher Induction/Mentoring
- Professional Development Evaluation
- Site Councils
- Web-based Professional Development Support

Leadership Academy (NIKE Partnership)
Professional Learning Team Supports

Support Staff:
PD Systems Support (Susan Ouellette)
1.0 Intervention Specialist (Sherri Deal)
.5 Secondary Lit Coach Support (Kayla Bell)
.5 Elementary Lit Coach Support (Tiffany Wiencken)
Retired Admin. on Special Assign. (Jeanne Sabbe)
Retired Admin. on Special Assign. (Betty Flad)
Classified Staff Development (Kristi Crooks)

SPECIAL EDUCATION TEAM:

Director of Special Education:
Lisa Darnold
Assistant Director, Josh Fritts
Assistant Director, Jeri Masciocchi
Assistant Director, Scott Schinderle
Administrative Assistant: Sandy Braaten

Administrator on Special Assignment with Professional Development
MaryJean Katz
Oregon Math Leadership Institute
Reading First

Aspiring Administrators:
Lawrence Gillespie, Counselor, Cedar Park
Veronica Jones, Literacy Coach, Barnes
Erica Marson, ALP, Aloha Huber Park
Sho Sigeoka, Counselor, Westview

CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION & ASSESSMENT TEAM:

Administrator for Curriculum and Instruction:
Gary Sehorn
Administrative Assistant: Helen Prescott
Specialist Support: Joanne Walker

Beaverton Individual Student Growth Model
Classroom Assessment, and Moderation/Calibration Systems
Co-facilitation of Program Collaboration Team
Common Course Table/New Course Processes
Coordination of Content Area Teacher Cadres
Instructional Materials Procurement and Inventory Management
International Baccalaureate and Advanced Programs
Oversight of Talented and Gifted Program
Quality Curriculum Cycle Processes and Products
PE/Health
Web-based resources related to Quality Curriculum Cycle

Continuing Specialist Positions
QCC /Adoption Compliance (Bruce Waller)
Secondary TAG & 6-10 Articulation (Heidi Hanson)
Elementary TAG (Ellen Arnold)
Website/Communications (Todd Frimoth)

Limited Term Specialist Positions:
Math Secondary (Manny Norse)
Math K-8 (Rebecca Carney)
.5 Fine Arts K-12 (Patrick Johnson)
.5 Eng/Literacy K-5 (Tiffany Wiencken)
.5 Eng/Literacy 6-12 (Kayla Bell)
.25 K-12 Science (Melissa Potter)

RESEARCH, GRANTS & ACCOUNTABILITY TEAM:

Administrator for Accountability:
Jon Bridges
.5 Administrative Assistant, Laurie Fiebich

Achievement Data
APQC
Assessment Advisory
Co-facilitation of Program Collaboration Team
District Goal Report
Facilitate the Research, Data, and Evaluation
Program Collaboration Team
Fiscal Accountability Reporting
Grants Oversight
Individual Student Growth Model
Program Evaluation
Progress Reporting/Report Cards
Research Approval and Oversight
Standardized Testing

Assessment Systems Management
Testing and K-5 Assessment (Caleb Harris)
6-12 Assessment (Robin Kobrowski)
1.0 TESA Support (Kay Jenkins)

Data Analyst Staff:
1.0 Data Analyst (Dee Carlson)
1.0 Data Analyst (Suzanne Riles)

Chief Information Officer:
Steve Langford

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS:

Director of ELL Department:
Wei-Wei Lou

Assistant Director, Angela Sandino
Administrative Assistant, Halie Locke
Department Secretary, Kerin Larson

APPENDIX B

EMAIL SENT BY DISTRICT RESEARCH ANALYST

TO PERSPECTIVE PRINCIPALS

Dear *(principal name)*:

This is to let you know that Carl Mead's research proposal has been approved through the District process that we have to consider incoming research applications. Carl (our AHS/SRHS Regional Administrator) would like to include *(school name)* in his project. Perhaps he has spoken to you already. Normally, approval of this kind is contingent on the principal's consent to participate. In this case, it seemed best to let Carl speak with you directly.

As Carl, too, is aware, please bear in mind that all research is voluntary, and that even if you agree to participate, those others in or affiliated with your school who may be invited to participate may still choose to decline. So all may choose to participate or not. Feel free to contact me if you like.

Suzanne Riles, PhD
Research Specialist

APPENDIX C

EMAIL SENT TO PRINCIPALS INQUIRING ABOUT PARTICIPATION

As you may be aware I have been working on my dissertation, for what seems like forever, but I have sought approval by BSD and the U of O for my human subjects and have been approved. In a nutshell I am looking at teacher leadership at the elementary level. The following is a brief abstract of my work.

The purpose of this study will be to conduct, as a participant observer and district-level regional administrator, three exploratory mini-case studies of elementary schools in the same district. The role of a regional administrator and school leadership teams in the Beaverton School District are the primary focus of this study and the influence by these bodies on the practices of 3 different school teams. This study takes place beginning in January 2008 and culminates in March 2008. Impressions and observations of team meetings and staff development activities will be journaled by the regional administrator. Interviews will be conducted with principals, teachers and parents to gain multiple perspectives of school improvement and leadership.

The reason I am contacting you, is to possibly be one of the three elementary schools that I conduct my research. This is entirely **voluntary**. In addition, I needed to choose three schools that I do not supervise so that it is not related to my interactions with principals and staff. I would like the opportunity to sit down and **meet with you, your fifth grade team of teachers and other staff that typically participate in team or data team meetings**. I can be flexible to meet with a group of individuals during the day, before or after school.

If this is something you and your team are willing to participate I would need about 15 minutes of your time to explain the role of school personnel in this process. Please let me know if you are willing to participate as a principal and your fifth grade team.

Thanks for considering this.

Carl Mead
Regional Administrator
Aloha & Southridge Region
503-591-4413

APPENDIX D

LETTER OF CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

December, 2007

Dear Beaverton Administrator or Teacher,

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Carl Mead, a doctoral candidate from the University of Oregon, Educational Leadership and a Beaverton Regional Administrator for the Aloha and Southridge region. I want to do this in order to gain a better understanding of what works in district-level and school level instructional leadership with site-based leadership teams, and also to gain a better understanding of my own leadership style, strengths and weaknesses in order to improve as an instructional leader. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because of your position in the Beaverton School District.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to take participate in a 30 minute interview. Individual names of participants and school names will not be included on any data collection, but will be coded separately for confidentiality. All interviews will be audio-taped for accuracy and understanding of your responses. In addition, impressions and observations of team meetings and staff development activities will be journaled by Carl Mead for the duration of this study to be completed by March, 2008.

The interview may pose an inconvenience to you more than any risk involved in the procedures. The intent is not to evaluate practices but to assist in directing me toward beneficial influences on district practices. The only cost involved in this survey is a cost of your time. I realize you are pulled in multiple directions with many demands placed upon you. The benefit of this work will assist me in my practices and interactions with building level administrators and teacher interactions. However, I cannot guarantee that you personally will receive any benefits from this research.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Subject identities will be kept confidential by assigning each interviewee a code.

Your participation is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with Carl Mead. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.
If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Carl Mead at 503-314-9773 (cell) or 503-292-1193 (home). If you have further questions that you would like to direct to my university advisor, you may contact Diane Dunlap at ddunlap@uoregon.edu .
If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact the Office

for Protection of Human Subjects, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403, (541) 346-2510. This Office oversees the review of the research to protect your rights and is not involved with this study.

Your signature indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willingly agree to participate, that you may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty, that you have received a copy of this form, and that you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies.

Print Name_____

Signature_____

Date_____

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol

Encouraging School Leadership in Elementary Schools

Interview Questions

Demographic Background

Years as a teacher/parent in the Beaverton School District: _____
Years as a teacher/parent outside of the Beaverton School District: _____

(Teachers and Principals Only)
Total # of years of educational experience (teaching & administrative):

Levels of teaching experience (circle all that apply):	elementary	middle	high
Number of years at each of these levels:	_____	_____	_____
Levels of administrative experience (circle all that apply):	elementary	middle	high
Number of years at each of these levels:	_____	_____	_____

Introduction

My study focuses on how individuals and groups go about encouraging school leadership in elementary schools. I am particularly interested in school leadership events, behaviors and activities that support high standards for student learning and continuous improvement. I am going to ask you five fundamental questions about school leadership.

1. How do you and the other members of your team/PLC communicate about high standards for student learning?
   Probe
   Probe

2. Do you have a shared culture of adult learning in your school? If so, describe it for me.
   Probe
   Probe

3. How is a culture of professional behaviors emphasized in your school?
   Probe
   Probe

4. Describe the types of data you use regularly to monitor for continuous improvement.
   Probe
   Probe

5. What types of activities do you do to design for, plan for, and implement goals?
   Probe: Agenda building in advance of a meeting?
   Probe: Using time at meeting to plan for next month.

APPENDIX F

OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

1. Communication of high standards for student learning.

   Evidence:

2. Evidence of planning to meet articulated shared directions.

   Evidence:

3. Communication of shared culture of adult learning.

   Evidence:

4. Communication of importance of culture of professional behavior.

   Evidence:

5. Regular use of data for monitoring continuous improvement.

   Evidence:

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