

Professional Learning
in High Achieving Elementary Schools

By

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	i
Table of Contents	ii
Abstract	v
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	3
Social Learning Theory	3
Teacher Learning	5
Components of Effective Professional Development	8
Differentiation	14
Communities of Practice	16
Chapter 3: Research Methods	23
Conceptual Framework	23
Constructivist Theory	23
Model for Analyzing Professional Development	24
Methods	26
Context of Research	26
Design	28
Participants	29
Procedures	31
Instruments	31
Analysis	33
Limitations	33

Chapter 4: Findings	37
Definition of Professional Development	39
Teacher Learning Versus Professional Development	43
Teachers As Experts	45
Teacher Voice in Education	48
Teacher Independent Learning	49
Structures for Professional Development Opportunities	49
Support and Roadblocks for Independent Learning	55
Impact of Independent Learning on Student Achievement	61
School District Professional Development	64
Administration View of Professional Development in the District	65
Professional Development at Grassy Knoll School and District	66
Professional Development at Sandy Shore School and District	73
Professional Development at Rocky Hill School and District	78
Commonalities Between Grassy Knoll, Sandy Shore and Rocky Hill	90
Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications and Future Research	94
Discussion and Implications of the Findings	94
The Model for Analyzing Professional Development	104
Future Research	107
References	110
Appendix A: Teacher Interview Protocol	115
Appendix B: Principal/Curriculum Director Protocol	116
Appendix C: Participant Years of Experience	117

Appendix D: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction School Report Card Sample	118
Appendix E: Informed Consent Letters	120

List of Tables:

Table 1 School Report Card Data	38
Table 2 Teacher Years of Experience	117
Table 3 Teacher Years at Current Site	117
Table 4 Administrator Years of Experience	117
Table 5 Definition of Professional Development	39
Table 6 Formats for Professional Learning	49

List of Figures

Figure 1 Desimone Model for Professional Development	13
Figure 2 Model for Analyzing Professional Development	25, 104
Figure 3 New Model for Analyzing Professional Development	106

Abstract

Professional development of teachers has been a primary strategy for school improvement in many schools. Previous research on professional development has shown that not all teachers are at the same entry point for professional development based upon instructional strengths, needs, interests and existing knowledge. Research also identified that there are certain contexts which promote the professional learning of teachers and could lead to gains in student achievement. This study examined professional development practices in three Wisconsin schools that had achievement gains above the state average while educating a diverse student population. In order to further inform administrators about professional development, data regarding individual teacher professional development and school or district mandated professional development was collected in order to answer two questions: In districts that have shown consistent and significant achievement gains for students, what are the occasions in which teachers learn? What organizational structures, cultures and supports shape teacher investment in professional learning in these districts?

New findings found that teachers view teacher learning and teacher professional development as two unique domains with different meanings. Furthermore, teachers sought to become an “expert” in a particular area that then defined who they were as an educator. Finally, teachers valued having a voice in education. Other findings supported previous research: student achievement gains were a main rationale for choosing professional development topics and for measuring the impact of new learning by both teachers and schools/districts. Findings also highlight the structures and roadblocks teachers identified as impacting their professional learning. Teachers valued discourse, active learning and choice as structures for professional development. Time was the roadblock most consistently mentioned to impede professional

development. Redundancy was also mentioned as a teacher concern about professional development. Finally, recommendations for administrators who plan professional development opportunities were identified.

Chapter One: Introduction

Teaching is a challenging profession that requires ongoing professional development in order for teachers to continue to grow and develop their expertise. Quality instruction is critical to student success. While research has shown that one of the greatest factors affecting student achievement is the teacher (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Sanders, Wright & Horn, 1997; Wayne & Youngs, 2003) and that teachers do differ in effectiveness and the level of effectiveness can lead to higher student achievement (Nye, Konstantopoulos & Hedges, 2004); we continue to have an equity issue in education as teacher quality is not the same for all school districts.

In order to address equity issues, it is important that the capacity for delivering rigorous instruction is built for all teachers. Preparation programs are not enough to adequately prepare teachers for a career that may span 30 years and see ongoing changes to best practices for curriculum and instruction. “Professional development for teachers is now recognized as a vital component of policies to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in our schools” (Ingvarson, Meiers & Beavis, 2005, p. 2) yet the quality of professional development delivered is inconsistent at best.

Teacher professional development can happen in isolated teachers according to their individual interests and areas of expertise. However, this learning is not enough to impact the education of all children. It is also important that professional learning occur for all teachers at a school or across a district and the professional learning needs to use the data from the students who are being taught as a basis for decision making. Therefore it is important for district and school level administrators to be more knowledgeable about teacher professional learning and under which contexts learning is maximized and transferred back to the instructional practice within the classroom. Administrators have the ability to provide the foundation and structures

for professional learning to occur. In order to inform administrators and help them make decisions about professional learning, this study seeks to answer these questions: “In districts that have shown consistent and significant achievement gains for students, what are the occasions in which teachers learn? What organizational structures, cultures and supports shape teacher investment in professional learning in these districts?”

Chapter Two: Literature Review

A review of research identifies critical components or structures for designing professional development that have been shown to have an impact on teacher learning and student achievement. To begin, a review of social learning theory will establish an understanding of how learning occurs and the importance of learning within a social context. Establishing social contexts for learning will prove to be key for administrators in their support of professional learning. It is also important to listen to the voice of teachers in identifying the structures which are most conducive to their learning. This review proceeds to identify the context and conditions teachers identify as increasing their opportunity to learn and defines the components of best practices for professional development designed by school districts. The review continues with research on differentiation of professional development. Differentiation allows for tailoring professional development opportunities around the needs of the teachers and most importantly the needs of the students based upon their data. Finally research on communities of practice as a method of professional development is reviewed, with professional learning communities offered as an example.

Social Learning Theory

In order to design contexts for professional learning, it is important to understand how learning occurs. Russian psychologist, Lev Vygotsky, is one of the earliest practitioners to look at learning as preceding development, rather than the reverse. Vygotsky argued that intelligence is a social product and development of thinking occurs in everyday experiences. One of the major facets of Vygotsky's work is the "Zone of Proximal Development". He espouses that learning and development are interrelated and learning should match an individual's developmental level. While the actual developmental level is the level of development of a

child's mental functions that exist because certain developmental cycles have already been completed, the Zone of Proximal Development contains those functions that are in the process of development. Since developmental processes lag behind learning processes, the Zone of Proximal Development is created. During this time of learning, imitation or learning with the assistance of others, is a key to actual development (Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore learning is a social activity in which other people play a part in an individual's self-development.

Vygotsky's work is summarized by Hausfather (1996) as having three themes: (1) understanding how the mind works means looking at how it changes; (2) social activity impacts higher mental functions; and (3) tools and signs impact higher mental functions. "Vygotsky's work viewed education as central to cognitive development and also an essential sociocultural activity" (Hausfather, 1996, p. 2). Internalization of knowledge within an individual relies on external social interactions. In an educational setting, the Zone of Proximal Development involves bringing people together with their individual perspectives, interpretations and understandings and having them actively share those with others to gain a deeper understanding of each other and jointly construct knowledge (Hausfather, 1996).

Within education, teacher "learning occurs in many different aspects of practice, including their classrooms, their school communities and professional development courses or workshops" (Borko, 2004, p. 4). Further, in order to "understand teacher learning, we must study it within these multiple contexts, taking into account both the individual teacher-learners and the social systems in which they are participants" (Borko, 2004, p. 4). Therefore, it is important to look at teacher professional learning as a social act and to be aware of the contexts and conditions under which teacher learning occurs.

Teacher Learning

For “growth and improvement of any educational institution, teacher professional development becomes a milestone in teachers’ continuum of lifelong learning and career progression” (Hien, 2008, p. 2). It is important to understand the context and conditions under which teachers identify that their learning is enhanced. Research on teachers as learners reveals several themes including the impact of districts on learning, the role of conversation on learning and the role of reflection on learning.

Districts have a significant impact on teacher learning (Grossman & Thompson, 2004; Hoekstra & Korthagen, 2011; Hollins, McIntyre, DeBose, Hollins & Towner, 2004). First, districts need to offer a positive learning climate for their teachers so they can embrace new learning and apply it to their practice (Hoekstra & Korthagen, 2011). Teachers appreciate the ability to give input on the focus of professional development. Conversely, the research shows that a lack of buy in to district professional development results in limited change in teaching practice (Carper, Jones, Mead, Parson, Van Dyke & Xu, 2009). Districts also relay subliminal messages to teachers based on topics the district chooses to discuss or tasks that are assigned. Grossman & Thompson (2004) found that “the tasks assigned by the districts taught teachers a way to look at and talk about teaching and directed their attention to particular facets of teaching” (p. 298). In this way, the district is providing a lens through which teachers focus their attention (Grossman & Thompson, 2004). Finally, it is important for leaders, especially incoming principals, to understand how professional development can enhance, diminish or neglect school capacity (Youngs & King, 2002). School capacity is “the collective power of the full staff to improve student achievement school wide” (Newmann, King & Youngs, 2000, p. 261). The school principal moving from a skeptic to the facilitator of the group at the same time

the teachers began to make a change in their interest and enthusiasm for the study group discussions is one finding that makes a positive connection between the role of administration and teacher learning (Hollins, McIntyre, DeBose, Hollins & Towner, 2004). In summary, leadership, organizational conditions and student achievement are interconnected. Trust must be established by principals so they can then create structures that promote teacher learning. These structures can be built through connecting staff with external experts or by supporting teachers in reforming internally (Youngs & King, 2002). Districts and school principals do have an impact on the professional learning of teachers.

Another major theme is that teacher conversations about practice are central to teacher learning (Gabriel, 2010; Hollins, et al., 2004; Taylor, Yates, Meyer & Kinsella, 2011). In a New Zealand study, experienced content area teachers were trained to lead their colleagues in professional development involving a national reform effort. The teacher leaders reported that the participants “valued group marking exercises using authentic student work to discuss clarification of standards” (Taylor et al., 2001, p. 91). In addition, the teacher leaders viewed themselves as “conduits for the flow of information between teachers, themselves and New Zealand’s overarching body that award qualifications” (Taylor, et al., 2001, p. 91). The New Zealand study also concluded that the teacher leader role offered networking opportunities among the teacher leaders. These networking opportunities impacted both the professional learning of the teacher leaders and the other participants in the study (Taylor, et al., 2001). In interviews of first, second and third year teachers about their professional needs, one common thread that emerged was the value of dialoging with colleagues, however, the topic of the dialog varied depending upon the year of experience. First year teachers conversed with colleagues for help and answers to questions, second year teachers used colleagues as their reflection partners

and third year teachers used colleagues as sources for new ideas (Gabriel, 2010). Teachers in a study group repeatedly engaged in dialog around successful instructional strategies (Hollins, et al., 2004). These studies demonstrate a connection between teachers who engage in dialog about teaching and learning and a positive impact on practice. In addition, these studies highlight that years of teaching experience result in differences in the type of support needed and to whom a teacher seeks out to obtain that support.

An additional theme that emerged was the importance of reflection on practice (Gabriel, 2010; Hoekstra & Korthagen, 2011). Reflection was a key element in the professional growth of teachers as first-year teachers “frequently mentioned reflection as a mechanism for professional growth” (Gabriel, 2010, p. 90) and second year teachers “valued professional development opportunities that forced them to reflect on their teaching in new ways through new lenses” (Gabriel, 2010, p. 90) while third year teachers’ reflections “focused on increasing their awareness and capacity to reach every student” (Gabriel, 2010, p. 92). “A supervisory approach that promotes meaning oriented reflection” was used by another study (Hoekstra & Korthagen, 2011, p. 62). While the initial supervisory sessions involved the supervisor leading the reflection, the supervisory process trained the teacher to reflect upon her teaching on her own. Teacher learning involves reflection on professional practice that is tailored to career stages in order to have meaningful impact upon practice.

The recent study of teacher learning has a connection to the earlier research of Stein and Wang (1988) on teacher self-efficacy, the teacher’s perceived value of the professional development and the impact of the professional development leading to a change of practice. Stein and Wang (1988) found that it was important for professional development to include support for initial use of new learning by teachers in order to increase their self-efficacy.

However, support also needed to be ongoing as teachers made the new learning a permanent part of practice, causing a continual increase in self-efficacy. Their findings revealed that the initial and ongoing support fostered more interest and commitment to the change in practice of teachers and sustained their motivation through the change in practice (Stein & Wang, 1988).

Ultimately a goal of all schools is to increase student achievement. Improving student learning depends upon a teacher's ability to teach (Hochberg & Desimone, 2010). However, the completion of a master's degree does not always correlate with increased student achievement. Instead of financially rewarding teachers who obtain master's degrees which are not relevant to their instructional practice, districts should provide professional development opportunities that are relevant to practice (Hill, 2007). Therefore, teacher learning must impact teacher knowledge, beliefs and practices (Hochberg & Desimone, 2010). Teacher learning must foster "the capacity to effect the instructional changes necessary to enable students to achieve proficiency on content and performance standards." (Hochberg & Desimone, 2010, p. 91). Since many of the learning opportunities teachers participate in are developed by school districts, it is important to review the research on the best structures for districts to include when designing professional development opportunities for their teachers.

Components of Effective Professional Development

One type of professional development in which teachers participate is designed by school districts. This type of professional development can be classified into two different models: traditional or contemporary. Professional development is delivered in a traditional way via workshops or conferences or in a contemporary way via collaborative action research, study groups or coaching (Boyle, Desimone, Porter and Garet, 2005; Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi

& Gallagher, 2007). Suppliers of professional development workshops gain greater profits when the professional development is liked by the participants not when the professional development is linked to new learning for the participants. This may suggest that teachers do not always walk away from professional development workshops with the need or desire to reflect upon their practice or change their practice in ways that improve student learning (Hill, 2007). While the literature is inconclusive regarding which model is more effective, Boyle, et al. (2005) found that observing colleagues and sharing practices are the most common types of professional development while study groups, drop in clinics and coaching are the least common. They also found that coaching and research inquiry were the most effective types of professional development for changing teacher practice. However, evidence does exist to validate that contemporary models are more effective than traditional models due to the duration of the professional development, not the type of professional development (Desimone, et al, 2002). Contemporary models of professional development are usually longer in duration and span over longer periods of time. The longer time duration resulted in teachers being more likely to implement the professional development into instructional practice than teachers who were engaged in short term professional development (Boyle, et al, 2005; Hill, 2007; Desimone, et al, 2002; Garet, et al, 2001; Penuel, et al, 2007). Duration of professional development also affects the effective aspects of professional development that follow (Garet, et al, 2001) which includes coherence, collective participation, active learning and connection to content.

When reviewing effective aspects of professional development, one important and common aspect is coherence (Desimone, et al, 2002; Garet, et al, 2001; Hill, 2007; Ingvarson, et al, 2005; Penuel, et al, 2007). Coherence is defined as “the extent to which professional development activities are perceived by teachers to be a part of a coherent program of teacher

learning,” (Garet, et al, 2001, p. 927). To be coherent, professional development should connect and extend what the teacher already knows. Professional development is more meaningful and more likely to result in changes to instructional practice when the professional development content is aligned with standards that teachers are accountable for teaching in their classrooms. Alignment should also exist between the professional development and the assessment tools used to assess student learning. Finally, it is important for teachers to communicate with others who are engaged in similar professional development to share solutions to problems, review student achievement data and provide motivation for one another (Desimone, et al, 2002; Garet, et al, 2001; Ingvarson, et al, 2005; Penuel, et al, 2007). Follow up professional development should have coherence to the initial professional development to continue to build a teacher’s instructional knowledge (Ingvarson, et al, 2005; Penuel, et al, 2007).

The next aspect of effective professional development is collective participation. Collective participation occurs when participants from the same school, department or grade level engage together in a shared professional development opportunity (Desimone, et al, 2002; Garet, et al, 2001; Hill, 2007; Ingvarson, et al, 2005; Penuel, et al, 2007). Collective participation was found to increase a teacher’s use of the strategy learned in professional development (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon and Birman, 2002). During a study focused on a collaborative process for action research involving pre-service and in-service teachers, working together was found to be an effective professional development process for dialoging about teaching and research. Through collaboration, both preservice and in-service teachers reported that they did more self-reflection of their teaching practice and then changed their practice to reflect what they had learned (Burbank and Kauchak, 2003). Collective participation recognizes that “individual teacher competence is the foundation for improved classroom practice, but to

improve achievement of all students in a school from one academic year to the next, teachers must exercise their individual knowledge, skills, and dispositions in an integrated way to advance the collective work of the school” (Newman, King and Youngs, 2000, p. 261).

Collective participation can lead to feelings of both community and professionalism (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003).

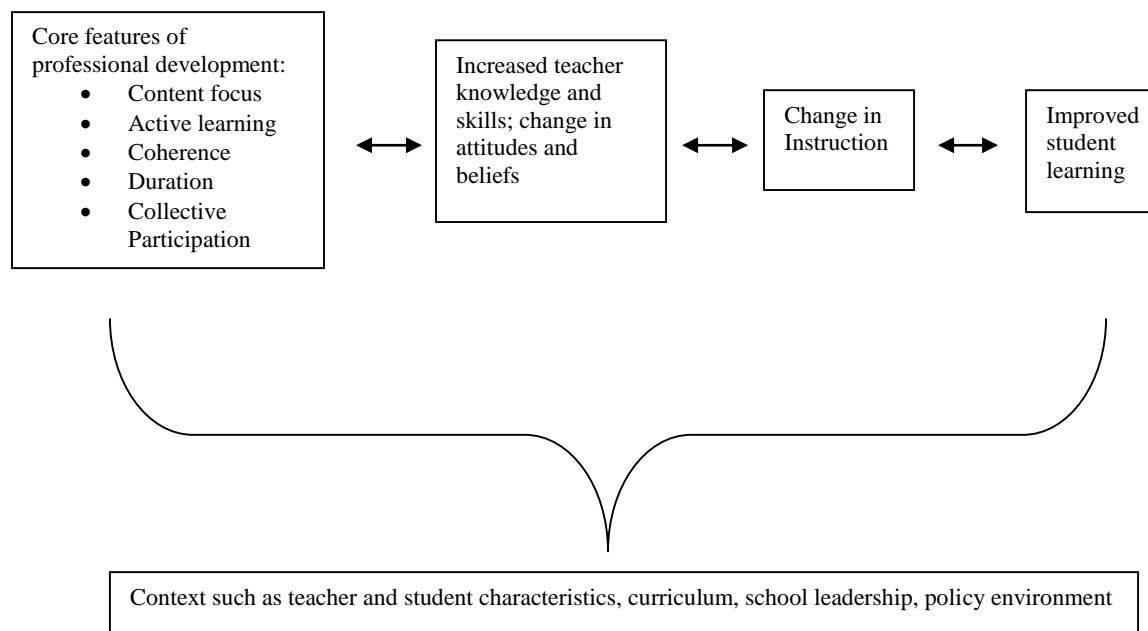
Along with coherence and collective participation, active learning is another aspect of effective professional development. Teachers who participated in professional development that involved active learning were likely to implement those strategies and change their teaching practices as a result of the professional development (Garet, et al, 2001; Ingvarson, et al, 2005). Effective professional development programs “draw teachers into an analysis of their current practice in relation to professional standards for good practice. They also draw teachers into close comparison of what their students are learning in relation to what students of that age and circumstance are capable of learning,” (Ingvarson, et al., 2005, p. 17). Effective professional development features active learning that invites teachers to engage in analyzing teaching and learning in a meaningful way that opens the doors for change in professional practice (Garet, et al., 2001).

A final aspect of effective professional development involves improving or deepening a teachers’ knowledge of content or skills in teaching specific content. Teachers participating in professional development that enabled them to increase their content knowledge changed their practice. During professional development, teachers also needed to improve or deepen their understanding of how students learn the content (Desimone, et al, 2002; Garet, et al, 2001; Hill, 2007; Ingvarson, et al, 2005; Penuel, et al, 2007). Professional development should demonstrate effective practice and have teachers implement that practice to see the results on their students’

learning. When professional development is tied to student learning, teacher efficacy is also increased (Ingvarson, et al., 2005). Professional development that has a direct link to content also improves teachers' abilities to have students engage in inquiry (Ingvarson, et al, 2005). During professional development activities, teachers should have opportunities to think about instruction, analyze instruction and talk about instruction (Penuel, et al, 2007).

In order to assess the design of professional development opportunities, Desimone (2009) proposes using a common conceptual framework to study professional development and its impact on student achievement. The rationale she espouses for using this framework is based on her contention that “the myriad of experiences that count as teacher learning pose a challenge for measuring professional development in causal studies” and “measuring the core features of teachers' learning experiences is a way to address this challenge” (Desimone, 2009, p. 181). This conceptual framework is built off the critical features of effective professional development identified in research: content focus, active learning, coherence, duration, and collective participation. In addition to identifying the critical features of professional development, the framework also establishes “an operational theory of how professional development works to influence teacher and student outcomes” (Desimone, 2009, p. 184). The model Desimone constructs (see Figure 1) identifies key inputs and the outcomes of the effects of professional development. It also identifies “the variables that mediate (explain) and moderate (interact to influence) professional development's effects” (Desimone, 2009, p. 184). Desimone (2009) suggests that this framework becomes a powerful base for constructing knowledge about professional development and its impact upon student learning.

Figure 1



Source: Desimone, L. (2009). Improving Impact Studies of Teachers' Professional Development: Toward Better Conceptualizations and Measures. *Educational Researcher*, 38(3), p. 185.

In summary, research identifies five aspects of effective professional development: longer duration, coherence with standards and curriculum, content connection, embedded active learning and collective participation (Desimone, et al, 2002; Garet, et al, 2001; Ingvarson, et al. 2005; Penuel, et al, 2007). It is also important that administrators value effective professional development and provide opportunities for professional development to happen (Ingvarson, et al, 2005; Zimmerman & May, 2003). Even though administrators have identified funding as a major obstacle to delivering professional development, administrators must prioritize money and make sure the professional development offered includes the aspects of effective professional development. (Ingvarson, et al, 2005). While these components should be included in effective professional development, another area to consider is differentiation to meet the needs of individual educators engaging in professional development opportunities.

Differentiation

Differentiation is highly favored in current educational practice. Differentiated instruction is defined as “ensuring that what a student learns, how he/she learns it, and how the student demonstrates what he/she has learned is a match for that student’s readiness level, interests, and preferred mode of learning.” (Tomlinson, 2004, p. 188). There are several compelling reasons for differentiation to occur. First, a heterogeneous classroom is an environment that is more consistent with the make-up of today’s society (George, 2005). Today’s classrooms are filled with students from different racial and ethnic minorities, students who speak a variety of languages, students from different economic statuses, students with a variety of background experiences and world views, and students with various disabilities (Tomlinson, 2005). A heterogeneous classroom is more likely to ensure that individual effort and persistence is emphasized as important for success and results in a greater likelihood that learning to mastery and automaticity occurs. George (2005) expounds, “Every student is unique and, to a degree, deserves and requires special attention and adaptation of the learning experience to fit those unique needs, interests, abilities and attitudes.” (p. 189). Education needs to focus on creating independent thinkers who are not reliant on the teacher. The role of the teacher should move to the facilitator of learning not the provider of information (George, 2005).

While differentiation is espoused as a best practice, Tomlinson (2005) has found that the lack of differentiation of instruction in classrooms is linked to a lack of role models. She exposes that we teach as we were taught. The goal of differentiation should be to “maximize the potential of all learners by proactively designing learning experiences in response to individual needs” (Santangelo & Tomlinson, 2012, p. 310). Most teacher candidates are told by their instructors to include differentiation in their lessons, however, rarely do these teacher educators

include differentiation opportunities into their own instructional practice. In order to differentiate, there must be an understanding of the connection between and among key classroom elements and how they impact learning and a connection between theory and practice (Santangelo & Tomlinson, 2012). Educators need guidance in applying a comprehensive model of differentiated instruction.

Not only is it important for teachers to have support to learn how to differentiate their instruction, they also need to have their learning differentiated to meet their individual needs. Differentiated professional development will maximize the individual capacities of teachers to grow and develop their instructional practice (Tomlinson, 2005). This involves rethinking the traditional way staff development is delivered to providing opportunities that are “catalysts for persistent and personalized teacher growth throughout a career” (Tomlinson, 2005, p. 12). Reeves (2006) criticizes school leaders who look to “vendors who cram every available second of professional development time with mind-numbing workshops” (p. 86) and also finds irony in the fact that hundreds of teachers may be asked to sit in an auditorium listening to a speaker emphasize the need for differentiated instruction as that speaker delivers a one size fits all professional development workshop. In her recommendation for a “phase theory of teacher development” (p.86), Gabriel (2010) states, “A one-size fits all approach to professional development inherently ensures that some teachers on staff are not engaged, challenged, or supported enough to be working at their full potential” (p.86). Gabriel (2010) argues that “just like effective instruction for students, effective professional development should be differentiated in order to be responsive to the needs, interests, awareness and commitment of individual teachers” (p.86). As administrators begin to design differentiated professional

development, they may want to consider communities of practice and its impact upon teacher learning.

Community of Practice

Communities of practice as defined by Wenger (1998) includes “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (p. 1). His work identifies three characteristics of a community of practice. The *domain* defines the identity of the group by their shared interest. Members have a commitment and shared competence. *Community* is the relationship that enables the members to learn from one another through activities, discussions, sharing information and helping one another. *Shared practice* is the shared repertoire of resources; including experiences, stories tools and ways of addressing recurring problems; that result from involvement in the community of practice. All three must exist and be developed simultaneously in order to be a community of practice (Wenger, 1998).

Wenger (1998) identifies stages of development that communities of practice experience. The first involves people of similar situations finding each other in the stage called potential. The next stage, coalescing, is where the members recognize their potential as a community. Active, the third stage, occurs when the members are engaged in developing a practice. Once the members no longer engage as intensely but the community still has vitality and knowledge the community is in the stage of dispersed. The final stage, memorable, occurs when the community is remembered by the participants as a significant part of their identities. In a community of practice, “members develop among themselves their own understanding of what their practice is about” (Wenger, 1998, p. 4). Participation has value for the members. Organizations that value knowledge as an asset understand the importance of communities of practice and the

organization becomes “a constellation of interconnected communities of practice, each dealing with specific aspects of the company’s competency.” (Wenger, 1998, p. 5-6).

Communities of practice have several functions. They exist to allow the exchange and interpretation of information including best practices, tips and feedback. The knowledge that is retained becomes the routines that can be used to initiate newcomers into the practice.

Communities of practice keep the organization at the cutting edge and are the reason that individuals want to invest their professional identities in the organization. They also help sort out what is important and what should be ignored. Learning occurs at the center of the community of practice as well as at the boundaries, where the community connects to other communities. Wenger (1998) states, “Communities of practice truly become organizational assets when their core and their boundaries are active in complementary ways” (p.6).

Leadership can nurture communities of practice by supporting participation through time, recognizing and valuing its existence, providing guidance, offering resources as needed, connecting the learning to business strategies and creating links to other communities of practice within the organization (Wenger, 1998).

An example of a community of practice is a professional learning community (PLC), most often identified by the work of Rick DuFour. According to DuFour (2004), there are several core principals of PLCs. The first principal is that PLCs exist to ensure that students learn and are not just taught. Three questions are used to verify student learning: What do we want students to learn? How do we know when they have learned it? And what will we do if they didn’t? One strategy for ensuring students learn is to look at what has been successful in impacting student learning and replicate that approach. The second principal of PLCs is to create a culture of collaboration. In PLCs, a culture of collaboration is defined as a “systematic process

in which teachers work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice” (DuFour, 2004, p. 3). This collaboration process involves working in teams and questioning each other. Teams publicly share their goals, strategies, materials, pacing, questions, concerns and results all focused around student learning. The third principal is a focus on results. In order to focus on results, the team must identify the current level of achievement, establish a goal to increase the level of achievement, work together to meet the goal, provide evidence of the success in increasing student learning. The effectiveness of the instruction is judged based on the results of student learning (DuFour, 2004).

A PLC has a clear sense of mission and a shared vision of the conditions that must be created to achieve the mission. The PLC thrives on continuous improvement through the analysis of data, identification of areas of concern, development of strategies to address concerns, and support for the implementation of strategies. Sharing of knowledge is an expectation and consensus is used to make decisions. When reaching consensus, the will of the group leads to a final decision and all members of the group are expected to cooperate in implementing the final decision (DuFour, 2003).

Principals have been found to facilitate or impede the work of PLCs. When principals work to build trust with their staff, they create a sense of shared purpose, which supports the work of the PLC. The principal is perceived to have a commitment to teachers and students. Principals who lay the foundation for collaboration and sharing to occur are valued. However, principal who only involved some staff in the PLC process and isolated other staff or who kept a totally hands off approach and did not involve themselves in the PLC process are viewed as impeding the work of the PLC (Scribner, Cockrell, Cockrell & Valentine, 1999).

PLCs become a structure to support professional development because they are built on the capacity of an organization to learn. Through the focus on student achievement, teacher improvement and continuous learning are supported. Teacher learning evolves from the sharing of knowledge and the critical reflection with others who share the same experiences. These teachers can implement their learning back in their classrooms. This process is valued by teachers because it is centered around students and achievement, increases collaboration with colleagues, empowers teachers, results in continuous learning and leads to improved school culture (Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2008).

Another example of a community of practice is a participatory culture. Jenkins, H., Purushotma, R., Weigel, M., Clinton, K., & Robison, A. J. (2009) define participatory culture as “a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one’s creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices” (Jenkins, et al. 2009, p.3). Participatory cultures provide opportunities for learning, creative expression, civic engagement, political empowerment and economic advancement. Due to strong incentives for creative expression and active participation, participants believe their contributions matter feel some degree of social connection with each other. “Schools are currently still training autonomous problem-solvers, whereas as students enter the workplace, they are increasingly being asked to work in teams, drawing on different sets of expertise and collaborating to solve problems.”(Jenkins, et al, 2009, p. 21). Participatory cultures address the need to be able to successfully navigate abundant and continually changing world of information. Through networking; the ability to search for, synthesize and disseminate information; collective intelligence is built. The collective intelligence is diverse (draws from different pieces of

information), decentralized (no one person controls or dictates), summarizes people's opinions into a verdict, and independent (pay attention to own thoughts without worrying what other people think). Participatory cultures bring people together to explore a common interest (Jenkins, et al, 2009).

While communities of practice rarely lead to execution of common work, shared outcome measures or mechanisms for comparing results by which progress toward specific goals can be judged, networked improvement communities endorse shared, precise, measureable targets. Participants then use what is learned to set new targets that are more ambitious. Since targets are under constant negotiation, the evolving targets shape and strengthen the activity within the community (Bryk, A. S., Gomez, L. M., & Grunow, A., 2011). According to Byrk, Gomez & Grunow (2011), "Networks enable individuals from many different contexts to participate according to their interests and expertise while sustain collective attention on progress toward common goals" (p. 6). Within networks, there is more discussion/debate and the focus is on "we" not "I". All networks have rules and norms for membership including who is allowed to join, how to join and how to participate.

In summary, research has shown that certain components and structures of professional development increase the likelihood of improving student achievement by building the capacity of teachers' instructional practice. Professional development needs to ground itself in the belief that learning as a social act. Teachers need to be actively engaged in discussing their practice with others; with time for communicating about instructional strategies and content. "Intensive professional development, especially when it includes applications of knowledge to teachers' planning and instruction, has a greater chance of influencing teaching practices and, in turn, leading to gains in student learning" (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson & Orphanos,

2009, p. 9). School districts must promote a climate for teacher learning and foster the capacity of teachers to change their practice to have a greater impact upon student learning. While teachers value having input into the planning of professional development, districts need to remember that the tone they set will impact whether teachers make a transfer of their new learning to their practice within the classroom. That transfer is more likely to occur if the professional development takes place over extended periods of time with opportunities to connect and extend new learning to what was previously known. Teachers need to be engaged in reflection about instructional practice as they are implementing new practice. It is also important for school districts to remember that all teachers are not at the same place in their learning. Needs vary based upon experience as well as content taught. Through differentiation, school districts can increase the value of professional development by aligning it to the needs of teachers. This is another area in which teachers can have a voice in the design of professional development. Finally, administrators can build the capacity of their teachers through the development of a community of practice, such as a professional learning community, participatory culture or network. Fostering a community of practice will engage teachers in the collective participation, active learning and reflection of instruction in their content area while using real student data to support the learning over the duration of the community.

Research on professional development recognizes that all teachers are not at the same entry point for professional development based upon instructional strengths, needs, interest and existing knowledge. Research also tells us that there are certain contexts which promote the professional learning of teachers and can lead to greater student achievement. It is time that administrators become more knowledgeable about the contexts in which teachers learn so that they can use this information when planning professional development and have a greater

likelihood of increasing the instructional capacity of teachers. It is only through the increased instructional capacity of our teachers that we can realize an equitable education for all children.

Chapter Three: Research Methods

District and school administrators have a vested interest in growing the instructional capacity of all teachers. “Improving professional learning for educators is a crucial step in transforming schools and improving academic achievement” (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2009, p. 3). Therefore, it is important for administrators to be knowledgeable regarding the contexts in which teachers learn.

Conceptual Framework

Professional development that involves teachers in both teaching and learning provides “occasions for teachers to reflect critically on their practice and fashion new knowledge and beliefs about content, pedagogy and learners” (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995, p. 59). The conceptual framework for this study is created from the themes that have emerged from research on professional development and teacher learning. The framework is based upon a belief in constructivism.

Constructivist Theory

Constructivist theory “offers an explanation of the nature of knowledge and how human beings learn” (Abdal-Haqq, 1998, p. 1). At the core of constructivist theory is the belief that individuals create or construct their own knowledge or meaning through the interaction of what is already known or believed with new experiences, information or ideas (Abdal-Haqq, 1998, p. 1). In his work, Prawat (1996) focuses on Postmodern Social Constructivism. Postmodern social constructivists embrace knowledge as a social construct rather than just an individual event. Ideas are socially “authored” by undergoing examination by the group that stated them and then “cashed in” by individuals who translate the meaning of the ideas to specific things (Prawat, 1996, p. 223). Many scholars have debated “the distinction between knowing and

doing” (Prawat, 1996, p. 224), but Prawat (1996) references Dewey who explained, “Knowing is doing” (p. 224). This theory is important in building my lens for conducting my research because as teachers participate in professional development opportunities, they must continually apply the new learning to their background knowledge of instructional practices in order to evolve into a new version of that instructional practice.

Model for Analyzing Professional Development

The model that I will be using is grounded in student achievement at the core and draws from previous research on components of high quality professional development including:

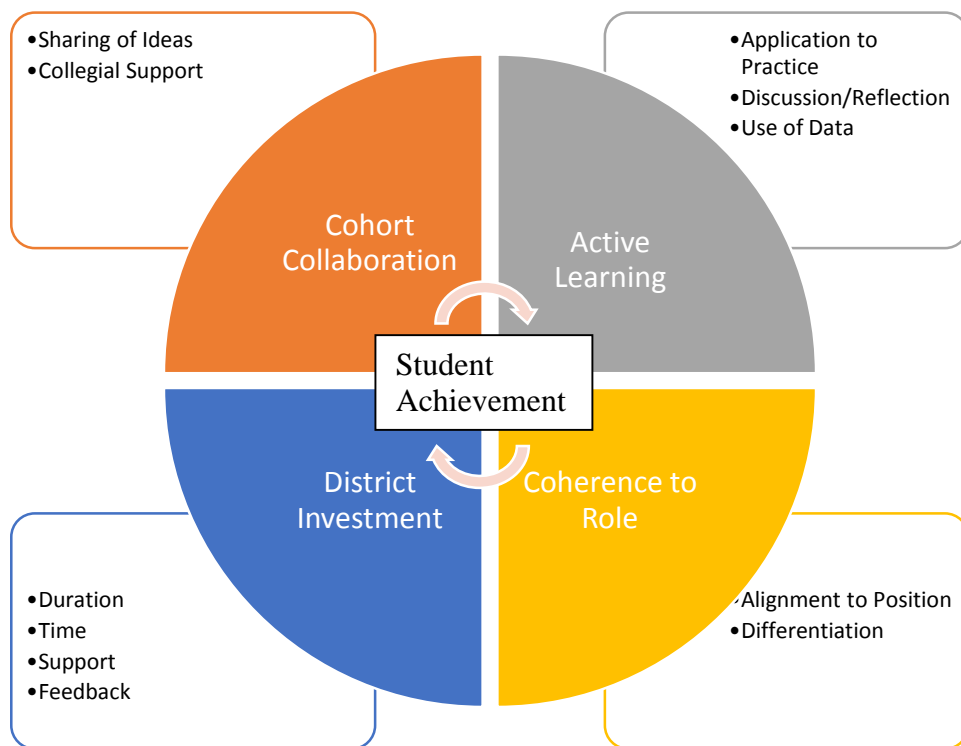
- 1). Cohort Collaboration
- 2). Active Learning
- 3). Coherence to Role
- 4). District Investment

A visual model of the lens for analysis is shown in Figure 2.

The first component of the conceptual framework for this study is cohort collaboration. In this component I will be looking for evidences of cohort model for implementing new learning. This evidence will include teacher engagement with their grade level or content area colleagues. A cohort model allows teachers with the similar job roles to share ideas in order to learn from one another. In addition, it allows teachers the chance to offer collegial support as they participate in sessions and implement their learning into their practice.

Active learning is the second component of the conceptual framework for this study. Active learning requires teachers to be actively engaged in the learning by trying the methods in their classrooms and continually evolving their practice. I will be looking to see how teachers take the strategies back to their classrooms to implement and return with student data that

Figure 2



demonstrates the level of effectiveness of the instruction. Another key focus is evaluating whether the professional development sessions provide opportunity for collegial discussion and individual reflection. Discussion should revolve around the development of instruction and student response to instruction. Real student data should be analyzed. Teacher participants should have opportunities to ask questions. Participants should also engage in self-reflection of their learning and its impact upon student achievement.

The third component of the conceptual framework for this study is coherence to role. The professional development must have coherence of new knowledge to the respective positions of the teachers involved: the learning must be relative and meaningful. Teachers must see the connection to their classrooms and understand the potential impact on student learning. Differentiation to meet the needs of all teachers must also be considered. Since teachers are in different phases of their careers and have different skill levels, confidence levels, and knowledge

levels, it is important that all teachers have an entry point in which they can engage in the learning.

Finally, the fourth conceptual framework component is district investment. District investment and valuing of the professional development must be evident. For district initiated professional development, this can be determined by the time dedicated to the professional development. The time must be ongoing and it should be embedded into the work day. Administration should demonstrate support for implementing new learning by participation and through allocation of resources. Lastly, administration should provide feedback to teachers on their implementation of the professional development in their classrooms. For individual teacher professional development, administration should support opportunities for the teacher to try the new instructional strategies within the classroom. Administration should also allow the teacher to share new learning with colleagues.

Methods

In the following section, I discuss the design, participants, and procedures for the study. Instruments used for data collection are described. Finally, analytic methods are proposed.

Context of Research

Wisconsin has a long standing reputation for excellent public educational experiences for students (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2013). This reputation is partly derived from the men and women who dedicate themselves to educating young people. Wisconsin's educational policy has embraced professional development as a foundation for its teacher licensure system. Wisconsin has also defined quality professional development in its criteria for districts use of Title II funds for professional development.

Within the licensure process in Wisconsin, the role of professional development of teachers and how teachers are granted licenses has been intertwined since 1983 when the law was changed for license renewals to require professional growth, of six credits or the equivalent, in order for the license to be renewed. In 2004, the law was changed once again to what is now PI 34 in April, 1994. PI 34 is based upon a belief that all educators need to be lifetime learners (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction website on Historical Timeline of Educator Licensing in Wisconsin, accessed April 13, 2013). While some educators are “grandfathered” with lifetime licenses or six credits for renewal licenses, all new teacher licenses since August 31, 2004 need to go through the Professional Development Plan (PDP) process.

According to the DPI, “The Professional Development Plan (PDP) is a process for renewal of an educator’s license based on planned professional growth and evidence of the effect of that growth on student learning.” (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction website on Professional Development Plan, accessed April 13, 2013, paragraph 5). The PDP plan must focus on the professional development of the educator in two or more of the Wisconsin Educator Standards. For license renewal, the PDP must contain three to five pieces of evidence that document professional growth and the effect on student learning (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction website on Writing a PDP, accessed April 13, 2013).

In addition to teacher licensure, Wisconsin also stresses the importance of professional development in its expectation for use of Federal Title II dollars for professional development. The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) defines activities that are considered to be high quality professional development. These activities:

- involve improving and increasing teachers’ knowledge of the academic subjects they teach so that students can meet the challenging state standards;

- are a major component of the school-wide and district-wide improvement plans;
- improve classroom management skills;
- are high quality, sustained, intensive and classroom focused in order to advance teacher understanding of effective instruction research based strategies;
- support recruiting, hiring and training of highly qualified teachers;
- are developed with extensive participation of teachers, principals, parents and administrators;
- provide teachers with the knowledge necessary to instruct English language learners or students with special needs;
- provide training in technology used for instruction;
- are regularly evaluated for their effectiveness;
- provide training in the use of data and assessments to inform practice; or
- provide training in ways that school personnel can work more effectively with parents

(Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction website on High Quality Professional Development, retrieved June 20, 2013). In order to receive a disbursement of Title II dollars from the DPI, districts in Wisconsin must show a connection between their professional development goals and these criteria.

The State of Wisconsin's expectations for and policy commitment to ongoing professional development are the rationale for choosing to research teacher professional learning in schools in Wisconsin.

Design

The design of this study will be a qualitative case study method (Creswell, 2007). Case study is distinguished by the intent of the study via a focus on analyzing a single issue within a

single case, analyzing a single issue across two or more cases or an intrinsic study of a case itself (Creswell, 2007). An intrinsic case study involves focusing on the case itself because the case “presents an unusual or unique situation” (Creswell, 2007, p.74). Through an intrinsic case study, I am able to study professional development program by drawing upon multiple sources of information.

Participants

In order to identify schools to study I looked at the Wisconsin school report cards from the 2013-2014 school year (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction website on School Report Cards , retrieved October 20, 2015). School report cards are prepared for each public school in the state by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and contain a variety of types of information about the school. Each school gets an overall accountability score and rating. The overall score and rating is based on scores in the areas of student achievement, student growth, closing gaps, and on track and post-secondary readiness. A sample of the Wisconsin School Report Card is located in Appendix D.

Schools within southeastern Wisconsin were chosen as these schools offered the most diverse student populations including students of color, students of low socio economic status as defined by numbers of students participating in the Federal Free and Reduce School Lunch Program and students identified with a disability. I did not consider schools in Milwaukee Public Schools, Racine Unified School District, Kenosha Unified School District or Madison Metropolitan School District as large districts pose difficulties with the approval process.

My study focused on three elementary schools that are demonstrating significant improvements in student achievement for traditionally marginalized students. In order to analyze the achievement of traditionally marginalized students, I identified schools that had at

least a 20% population of students of color, at least a 20% population of low socio-economic students as defined by free or reduced lunch eligibility and at least a 5% population of special education students. Once those schools were identified, I looked further into the data using the following criteria:

- School accountability score and rating of exceeds expectations or higher. Out of 100 possible points, a school would have to score 73 or more points to exceed expectations.
- Student achievement ratings at or above the state average. The state average achievement scores are 28.8 for reading and 38.1 for math out of a possible score of 50 in each area.
- Student growth ratings near or above the state average. The state student growth scores are 34.2 for reading and 33.6 for math out of a possible score of 50 in each area.
- Closing gap ratings near or above the state average. Out of a possible score of 50, the state averages are 34.0 for reading and 32.9 for math.
- Three year reading and math test scores for the school above the state average and holding steady each year. The scores are the percentage of students in elementary school grades 3-5 who have scored proficient or advanced on the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examination (WKCE). The statewide percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced on the WKCE in the area of reading for the past three years has been around 36% and the statewide percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced on the WKCE in the area of mathematics for the past three years has been around 48%.
- Total number of students tested in grades 3-5 was over 150 students. This equates to at least 50 students in each grade and allows for enough cells to be populated in order to report data.

In order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality for the participants, the three schools chosen will be identified in this study as Sandy Shore Elementary, Rocky Hill Elementary, and Grassy Knoll Elementary. Teachers from each site will be referred to by Teacher A, Teacher B, Teacher C, Teacher D and Teacher E as needed. Each principal will be referred to as Principal and the name of the school. The unique characteristics of each school and the participants are further described in Chapter 4.

Procedures

To address my research questions, I interviewed teachers and the school principal. I made efforts to recruit teachers with varying years of teaching experience and teachers who represent classroom teaching positions, special education teaching positions and specialist teaching positions. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and took place at a location of the interviewee's choosing or via phone. Interviews were recorded and transcribed.

I was able to observe a professional development session in one of the schools included in the study. During the session, I observed the participants and took notes on the structure and design of the professional development as well as the actions of the participants. I was asked to participate in two of the activities that occurred during the session.

Instruments

Two different data collection instruments were employed: an interview protocol for teachers and an interview protocol for administrators.

The teacher interview protocol is in Appendix A. This protocol begins with a few ice breaker questions in order to provide general information about the teacher. Questions such as "How long have you been teaching?" and "What grades/subjects have you taught?" were used to gain background information about the teacher and ensure that I have teachers with a variety of

years of experience and in each of the three teaching groups referenced above. The remainder of the interview questions gather information about the types of professional development the teacher has participated in and how beneficial professional development has been on growing or impacting that individual's professional practice. Questions were asked about the types of professional development that has been chosen by the participant as well as the types of professional development chosen by the district or school. Counter to that, I also asked about professional development that the teacher did not value and why. A question about the process for changing practice was asked. Finally, I asked about the role of the school principal or district in supporting and/or hindering professional learning.

The interview protocol for administrators is located in Appendix B. This protocol begins with a few ice breaker questions that will give me some general information about the administrator. For example, questions like "How long have you been an administrator in your current position?" were used to build rapport and gain some background information about the interviewee. The remainder of the interview questions are focused on professional development. Questions focused on determining the needs for professional development as well as the structure of professional development including any criteria for the professional development sessions. Questions were also asked about how the administrator takes into account individual teacher learning needs when planning professional development. Finally, questions were asked about the evaluation of the professional development and how its effectiveness is determined along with any accountability for the teachers to change their practice in light of the professional development.

Analysis

The analysis process was conducted in several steps. After reading all interview notes and analyzing any documentation gathered, I coded the text. According to Saldana (2013), “code is a researcher-generated construction that symbolizes and thus attributes interpreted meaning to each individual datum for later purposes of pattern detection, categorization, theory building, and other analytic processes” (p.3). Coding is not an exact science; it involves interpretation by the researcher. I looked for categories, themes and concepts that emerged in order to make meaning of the data. The coding process is cyclical in that some of the data was reviewed several times and coded and recoded as the various categories, themes and concepts were explored. In addition to coding the interview notes, I used analytic memo writing to capture my reflection, coding strategies and other information that I felt impacted my overall analysis. These memos were also coded and included in the final analysis, if appropriate (Saldana, 2013).

Limitations

This research studies professional development from the perception of teachers and administrators, relying heavily on their interpretation and perceptions regarding the quality and impact of professional learning on the instructional practices of teachers. Since it is a limited case study, it is only designed to build conceptual understanding of the structure of professional development in which teachers engage and the role of administration in supporting and/or hindering that process and is therefore not generalizable beyond the three cases included in this research.

As an educator of 27 years, 13 of which were spent as an administrator, I have vast experience in planning and implementing professional development opportunities for teachers. I

also have been a participant in professional development: some planned by the school district for which I was employed and some I personally sought out for my own professional growth. Since I have that background, it is important to acknowledge personal biases that I have from my experiences. I have personally found the one stop experience to be of limited value. A one session experience typically is not enough for me to change my practice. However, I do find these sessions to be of value to affirm instructional strategies that I have been using and to refine those strategies to make them more effective. When planning professional development, I often plan periodic follow up sessions in order to support a major professional development initiative so that the learning is continually strengthened. Another bias is my value of personal reflection. As a thinker, I spend a considerable amount of time reflecting on my practice or the work that I am doing; looking at both strengths and areas to improve. While I have learned to be critically reflective and position student achievement as the center of my reflection, I need to remember that not everyone embraces or values reflection as I do. I believe that quality reflection needs to be taught and practiced and people will not necessarily engage in that practice because time is allotted or it is an expectation. When supporting the reflection of teachers, I often use a set of reflective questions that will help the teachers focus on key aspects of their learning. Along with reflective practice, I am also quick to embrace change. I enjoy the challenges that come with changing my practice. This is contrary to many people who become very anxious about change and are resistant to engaging in the change experience. It is important to be mindful that everyone has their own change journey; some take a fast pace, some take a steady pace, some take a slow pace and others are resistant to any change and don't feel the need for change. I also learn by engaging in deep conversation and questioning practice. When engaged in professional development, I seek to be an active participant because I feel it makes my learning experience

richer. I thrive on interacting with colleagues and hearing their perspective and how it connects with my own. For that reason, I value collegiality and learning with others. Every individual has their own learning style and level of comfort when engaging in professional development and speaking about his/her practice. When planning professional development I try to account for various learning styles by providing various opportunities for engaging with colleagues. I feel a variety of experiences allows individuals to engage in experiences that are comfortable and others that stretch their comfort levels. Finally, I have experienced different levels of administrative support of professional development. I feel professional development is stronger when an administrator is committed to the professional development. This commitment includes attending and actively participating or leading all sessions, providing time for the professional development and for teachers to implement the new learning into their practice and providing feedback for teachers on the implementation of the learning. My experiences have also led me to believe that there are different types of administrators: some are instructional leaders and some are managers. Not all administrators have a solid understanding of curriculum and instruction. When an administrator does not have this background, it has been my experience that they are less supportive of teacher learning and growth. As I code and analyze my data, it is important for me to acknowledge these biases about professional learning and professional development experiences. It is key for the data to speak for itself and for the themes to emerge as they are, not how I think that it should be or want it to be. I plan to use my reflection of the data and these three questions to help me identify when my biases have impacted my analysis.

1. What surprised me?
2. What intrigued me?
3. What disturbed me?

The first question will allow me to track assumptions that I am making as I review the data; the second question allows me to track my positionality toward the data; and the third question will allow me to track tensions within my value, attitude and belief systems (Saldana, 2013). These reflective questions will be used after each interview or piece of evidence is coded and included in my analytic memos.

Chapter Four: Findings

This study focused on the professional development of teachers in three Wisconsin elementary schools. Grassy Knoll Elementary is located in an urban district that serves approximately 10,000 students in twelve elementary schools, three middle schools, two high schools and four charter schools. Grassy Knoll's student population is 23% students of color, 59% students of low socio-economic status as determined by eligibility for the federal free and reduced school lunch program, and 9% students with disabilities. Grassy Knoll serves between 350-400 students in grades kindergarten through five. Sandy Shore is located in a suburban school district that serves approximately 7,000 students in nine elementary, two middle schools, two high schools and two alternative schools. Sandy Shore's student population is 36% students of color, 21% students of low socio-economic status as determined by eligibility for the federal free and reduced school lunch program, and 12% students with disabilities. Students in grades kindergarten through five attend Sandy Shore, with a total student population between 450-500 students. Rocky Hill Elementary is located in a suburban district that serves approximately 2,000 students in two elementary schools, one intermediate school, one high school, and one charter school. Rocky Hill's student population is 33% students of color, 20% students of low socio-economic status as determined by eligibility for the federal free and reduced school lunch program, and 16% students with disabilities. Rocky Hill houses grades kindergarten through six, with a total population between 550-600 students. Table 1 identifies the 2016 achievement data for each school along with the state average as reported in the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction School Report Cards. According to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, schools that have an overall score between 83 and 100 are considered to "significantly exceed expectations" and schools with an overall score between 73 and 82.9 are considered to "exceed expectations". In each of the areas: reading achievement, math achievement, reading growth,

math growth, closing gaps reading, and closing gaps math, schools can earn up to 50 points in each area. These scores are based on a formula determined by the state that includes data from state testing for grades three through five/six. A sample report card produced by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction is located in Appendix D.

Table 1: School Report Card Data

School Site	Overall Score	Reading Achievement	Math Achievement	Reading Growth	Math Growth	Closing Gaps Reading	Closing Gaps Math
Grassy Knoll	75.4	29.2	42.1	35.9	34.2	36.5	36.9
Sandy Shore	84.6	39.9	38	46.8	39.9	41.4	39.9
Lake Bluff	80.3	43.6	50	43.6	50	39.9	33.1
State Average		28.8	38.1	34.2	33.6	34	32.9

The findings are based on interviews of eleven elementary teachers and three elementary administrators. Of the eleven teachers, five are classroom teachers, three are specialist teachers, and three are support teachers. The specialist teachers represent art, music and physical education. Five teachers were interviewed from Rocky Hill, five teachers from Grassy Knoll and one teacher from Sandy Shore. I was not able to interview more teachers from Sandy Shore, but I felt the data from one teacher and the administrator was valuable as this school was heavily vested in the PLC model, so I have included it as a third case. The number of years of teaching experience spanned from 2 years to 38 years, with teachers at their current school between 2 years and 23 years. The administrators had 30, 24 and 16 years in education, with 1 year to 10 years of administrative experience. Tables 2, 3 and 4 located in Appendix C show the breakdown for years of experience for the participants.

Definition of Professional Development

Defining professional development ensures that teachers and administrators have the same understanding of the purpose of professional development. Table 5 identifies the various responses for the definition of professional development. The definition of professional development had a common component for all 14 participants. The common component involved some statement about the opportunity to grow a teacher's practice; whether this was stated as "bettering myself as a teacher," "growing professionally," or "staying current in my practice." Grassy Knoll's Teacher B stated, "I think for me it's the constant learning, I want to continue to get better." The fact that both administrators and teachers identify growth as a component of professional development reveals a clarity of purpose for professional development and implies both teachers and administrators expect a change of practice based on the new learning.

Table 5: Definition of Professional Development

Component Identified	Number of Participants Who Identified this in their Definition
Better Myself as a Teacher	4
Grow Professionally	8
Staying Current	2
Independent or Collaborative	1
A Way to Support Teachers in a Specific Area of Need	1
Working with Staff	1
Improve Student Learning	4
Closing Gaps	1

Surprisingly, professional development was connected to student achievement by only four of the respondents. Sandy Shore's Teacher A talked about using professional learning to improve teaching and student learning, including closing gaps. Teacher B from Grassy Knoll felt any learning is beneficial if she can use it to help her students. Grassy Knoll's Teacher E linked

professional development to anything that can help her become a better teacher and advance her students to help them find success, while Grassy Knoll's Teacher D defined professional development as "any way that I can better myself to improve my student learning and to make my students more successful". In addition to having student achievement as part of their definition of professional development, these teachers all stated that they collect and analyze some form of data to determine the impact of their professional learning on student achievement. The definitions of professional learning for these teachers was tied to a greater purpose besides the teacher. When analyzing this data on its own, it was shocking that so few respondents connected professional development to student achievement in their definitions. However, student achievement did feature into professional development in other ways, as identified throughout the findings.

In my definition of professional development I viewed professional development as having two components, one that teachers chose to learn on their own and one that districts provided. Ideally, teachers and districts would both be responsible for professional development. Teachers ultimately make instructional decisions for their students and know their individual strengths and weaknesses. Teachers must embrace change and take responsibility for implementing new learning into their practice, therefore they must take responsibility for engaging in professional development opportunities. Districts identify the initiatives and instructional practices that the district values. Districts must then make sure teachers are versed in those initiatives and instructional practices so that they are using them with their students. This shared ownership allows the teacher to develop his/her practice as well as allowing the district to develop the practice of teachers. However, ownership for professional development varied in these findings. Responsibility for professional development was viewed as owned by the district

according to two of the teachers and two administrators. One of the teachers who identified the responsibility of professional development lying with the district has been in education for over 30 years and would be considered at the end of her career. This teacher has a lifetime teaching license and does not have any requirement for continued learning connected with her teaching license renewal. In fact, she identified district professional development as the only means for her to keep current in her professional practice. The other teacher who defined professional learning as the responsibility of the school district is currently pursuing an administrator's license. As part of his administrative licensing requirements, he has been focused on acquiring hours of administrative responsibility and part of those hours have come from delivering professional development to his colleagues. In addition, both of these teachers work at Rocky Hill. Rocky Hill is currently engaged in implementing a large initiative with a strong professional development component. This administrator also viewed professional development as the responsibility of the district. His role has been to provide opportunities for teachers to engage in the professional development component of their initiative. He is in his first year as an administrator in the school and much of his time and focus has been dedicated to this initiative. This may account for the reason ownership of professional development is viewed as the responsibility of the district by these two teachers and administrator. The Grassy Knoll Administrator also viewed professional development as responsibility of the district. The district that includes Grassy Knoll Elementary School has a large district controlled professional development program and has a number of hours of professional development that teachers must meet. The district requires the building level administrators to oversee the accountability for professional development. Only one teacher spoke against the professional learning offered by the district. This teacher, a specialist, did not feel the district learning related to her position and

sought all of her professional learning that she implemented into practice from outside the district. Rocky Hill Teacher B included both the individual and district her in definition of professional development. She has been teaching over 30 years and has a lifetime license but also is a National Board Certified Teacher. She stated, “Individual professional development is keeping current in your area of expertise. Professional development for the district is making sure everybody becomes more knowledgeable.” The eight other respondents spoke about professional development in terms of the individual. The seven teachers who defined professional development as the responsibility of the individual did identify district offerings as a means of keeping current in their practice or as having a major focus in their learning. Five of these teachers were from Grassy Knoll and one was from Sandy Shore. The Sandy Shore Administrator also spoke about learning that occurs in the district and learning that teachers do on their own. Both of these districts offer teachers some choice in district learning as outlined further in the chapter under district learning. This choice allows the teachers to have a voice in the areas of focus for their individual professional development. The other teacher was from Rocky Hill and spoke passionately about her desire to continue to grow her professional practice. While not all of the respondents viewed the responsibility for professional development as owned by both the individual and the district, I asked the eleven teachers to reflect upon both individual and district learning.

The findings have been divided into two categories: new findings that add to the research on teacher learning and professional development and findings that support previous research on teacher learning and professional development. New findings include a marked difference in teacher perceptions about professional learning versus professional development. Findings also included teacher desire to become an expert in an area of their choosing. Another new finding

was teacher desire to have a voice in education. Several findings support previous research. These findings showed that student achievement was at the center of decision making regarding both the planning and assessing of professional development. While structures for professional development vary, the findings also showed that discourse, hands-on learning and choice are all valued by teachers. Time was identified as the largest roadblock for professional learning. District accountability for professional development varied and districts were trying to connect professional development to Educator Effectiveness. While teachers felt supported by administrators in their learning and implementing new learning, the administrator and teacher relationship impacts professional development. These findings are further elaborated in this chapter.

Teacher Learning versus Teacher Professional Development

At the onset of my research, I used the terms teacher learning and teacher professional development interchangeably. However, the conversations with teachers evolved my thinking and I realized that teachers view these terms as two unique concepts. Teacher learning occurred when the teachers were implementing new learning into their practice so that it would become embedded and a piece of who they were as an educator. Teachers spoke about their experience with the change process for embedding new learning. The change process occurred differently for individuals. Grassy Knoll Teacher C stated, “Change takes time, especially systemic change.” Discourse with colleagues was mentioned as a key factor in the change process. Nine of the eleven teachers stated that some form of discourse with colleagues occurred as they implemented the change process. This discourse could occur before, during or after implementing the change and sometimes it occurred at all three stages. Seven teachers jumped into the change process by implementing the new learning all at once, while four teachers broke

the process into smaller pieces and implemented in parts. Four teachers also spoke about being reflective through the change process and making adjustments as needed. Rocky Hill Teacher B summed up the need for teachers to change by stating, “I don’t like seeing people get into ruts in education because I don’t think it is being fair to kids. And so for me, um, I just change all the time because that is the way to be effective. You know, I could never keep anything more than a few years because I never do anything the same again so every year it is oh I’ll do this because that is what the kids need.” Teachers recognized the need for change in their practice through the embedding of new learning in order to successfully meet the needs of students and ensure student achievement. Teacher learning, in this view, aligned more closely with the research on communities of practices with its goals of exchanging information, remaining at the cutting edge of practice, and building a culture of collaboration.

On the other hand, professional development was aligned with research on best practice components for professional development including coherence, collective participation, active learning, context embedded and in some instances duration. Professional development was viewed as something that is being done to the teacher. Professional development was used to share information, introduce new materials or even to introduce a new instructional technique or strategy. However, professional development did not have a deep impact on practice until teachers embraced it as new learning and underwent the change process to embed the learning into practice. Rocky Hill Teacher A expressed frustration with district professional development stating, “When we are given some type of professional development or a new idea to use in our classrooms the one aspect that we really push that we just don’t have time to develop lesson plans or collaborate together on how we are going to do those things in the classroom.” Teachers agreed that this structure of professional development was not conducive to their learning.

Administrators also referred to professional development in terms planning for teachers and not with a plan to follow through with ongoing support to impact teacher learning. Rocky Hill administrator stated, “I think that the professional development comes out as a matter of necessity reflecting the plans and programs that we’ve committed to. It is a bit more top down and that administration is saying we need to do this.” Professional development did not necessarily equate to teacher learning in a means that is impactful for instructional practice. It was really up to the individual teacher to turn the knowledge and information received into practice. Only when the teacher chose to apply the knowledge and information did teacher learning occur.

Teachers as Experts

Teachers realized that their roles have many different layers. Teachers, especially at the elementary level, were expected to be a jack-of-all-trades. In spite of these expectations, teachers often gravitated to one area in which they honed their skills to become an expert. This area aligned with their professional interests and varied based upon the individual. However, teachers did take student achievement into account as they made their decisions about their personal learning.

Teachers identified areas that they chose for their own individual professional learning and why they chose to learn in those areas. Nine teachers identified more than one area of study and offered different reasons for choosing each area. While only four teachers defined professional learning connected to student achievement, it was clear that teachers did put student achievement at the forefront of their decision making when choosing areas for professional learning.

Four teachers chose areas for individual learning because of the population of learners being taught. For example, Teacher C at Grassy Knoll increased her knowledge about educating students from poverty because the number of students who are impacted by poverty is increasing at the school. After analyzing their achievement data, the school noticed a discrepancy between students of poverty and other learners. Rocky Hill Teacher B learned more about behavior management techniques, assistive technology and differentiation because she felt “inadequate” and that she wasn’t being effective enough with instruction for her students. Rocky Hill Teacher E focused on cultural competency. She felt that focusing on cultural competency was important because “I am a white woman and I teach in a majority white district but I have many different students ... I think education is the equalizer and if I can’t provide that equal education or strive to provide that equal education then I am not doing as much as I should be doing or could potentially be doing.” Her goal was to be able to have a greater understanding of her students of color which she felt would help her to educate them. While none of these teachers mentioned student achievement in their definitions of professional learning, these teachers connected their learning to the population characteristics of their students, their ability to teach to the population, and the achievement of the population.

Other teachers chose areas for their personal learning based upon what he/she felt was important for students. “Even for my students, I think if they are not technology savvy, they are going to have a difficult time down the line in school, or in college or going into the business field or whatever they choose to do,” stated Grassy Knoll Teacher B in reference to why she focused on growing her skills in the use of technology in the classroom. She goes on to say, “I know technology is a big thing so I have made an effort on my part to learn more technology. I have to think about how am I going to make this work in my area because I am not going to use

it just for the sake of, oh, this is really cool. It has to be appropriate, it has to have a place.” The National Board Certification process was the catalyst for learning that led Sandy Shore Teacher A to look to her learners and their achievement for making instructional decisions. She stated, “One thing that I learned was how to improve your teaching by looking at where the students are now and not just going by your lesson plan. I think that was a big eye opening for me, not just looking at your teacher’s manual and going from there but really looking at where the kids are now and plan from there.” Sandy Shore Teacher A along with two other teachers decided to focus on a content area such as reading or writing because they wanted to improve their instructional practice in that subject area. These teachers were influenced by the learning needs of their students when determining areas of personal learning. Of these four teachers, three of them use some form of data to determine if their professional learning has an impact on student achievement. These three teachers appear to see a connection between instruction of students, student learning, professional learning and student achievement.

Student achievement does play an important role in decision making about professional development. When speaking to connecting new learning back to classroom instruction, Grassy Knoll Teacher A stated, “The goal is I can bring it back to our students here and I can share it with them. To me that is the goal. It’s not how you can keep it for yourself, it is bringing it back and how you can use it with our students here.”

While 8 of the teachers made decisions about their individual learning topics based on their students, three teachers chose topics based upon their own interest. One reason for choosing an area for individual learning was because the teacher was exposed to an instructional theory and the teacher developed a deep interest in the theory and chose to learn more. This same teacher chose another area for study based on current research on an instructional

technique. This teacher did not mention student learning in any of her responses. A second teacher chose the area of administration because he could not imagine himself teaching for his entire career. While he did not mention student achievement directly in his responses, he did say that he felt that his learning in the area of administration helped him to give better feedback to the instructional aides that are assigned to him and work with his students. His ability to support the growth of his aides through feedback, a result of his learning about evaluation in his coursework, helped his aides to work with his students more effectively. Although he did not mention any data, he felt there was a connection between his feedback, the instruction given by his instructional aides, and student achievement. Finally, a teacher chose to focus on mindfulness because she felt it was beneficial to the brain and prepared kids for learning. This teacher did have student achievement in her definition of professional development and does use data to determine the impact of professional learning on student achievement. These teachers had looser connections to the direct needs of the students in determining their choices for individual professional learning and had differing value placed on the connection between professional learning and student achievement. Regardless, teachers chose areas in which to become experts and focused their independent learning on those areas. Teachers made changes to their practice based upon their learning.

Teacher Voice in Education

The third new finding was that teachers sought opportunities to have a voice in education. In the current climate for education, especially in Wisconsin, teachers have been caught in the political landscape and they have felt the impact of turmoil and opposing views of education. For this reason, more teachers looked to take a more active role in their districts and have a voice in educational decision making. Rocky Hill Teacher E stated, “I think that I am lucky that I am

in a district that really supports public education. I have always been involved in the union and really advocated for the rights of teachers, the professionalism of teachers. But I know not every district is like that.”

The following findings aligned with previous research findings.

Teacher Independent Learning

Structures for the Professional Development Opportunities

Teachers identified a variety of formats for learning, listed in Table 6. These formats were reported to happen through a teacher’s individual choice. For example, the district opportunities were workshops or in-service opportunities that teachers could sign up for outside of school hours, not those required by the district during or after the work day.

Table 6: Formats for Professional Learning

Type of Professional Development Opportunity	Number of Participants Who Identified This Opportunity As Beneficial
Discourse with Colleagues	10
District Opportunities	7
Attended Conferences/Conventions	4
Read Books	4
University Coursework	4
Community Based Classes	3
District Committees	3
National Board Certification Process	2
Professional Membership in an Organization	2
Read Articles	2
Education Blogs	1
Followed Educational Leaders online	1
Online Demonstrations	1
Presented at Conferences	1
Social Network Groups	1

Discourse with colleagues was sought out by teachers as a stand-alone means for professional learning. This finding supported previous research that had found that teacher

conversations about practice are central to teacher learning (Gabriel, 2010; Hollins, et. al., 2004; Taylor, et. al, 2011). Ten of the eleven teachers felt one of their most valuable resources was colleagues because they could learn so much by visiting their classrooms or just talking with them. Two teachers from Grassy Knoll discoursed with colleagues through membership in state or national education organizations. Three teachers at Rocky Hill specifically mentioned talking with their colleagues at their school was impactful and a major means for their professional development. Sandy Shore used Professional Learning Communities to stimulate conversation and discourse in the school focused around student learning. The other four teachers networked with colleagues through coursework or personal connections they had with other educators either within or outside of their district. The only teacher who did not mention discourse with colleagues was a specialist teacher at Rocky Hill. She spoke a lot about being isolated as the only specialist in that area in her building and the fact she had no one that could discuss the specific content and instructional needs of learners with her. She also mentioned that the district provided few opportunities for the teachers in that special content area within the district to come together to engage in discourse. However, she did seek out people in the community whose livelihoods were in the same field as her area of instruction. She tried to build relationships with these professionals so that she can have a support network in order to grow her professional practice. Discourse with colleagues, in a variety of forms, was clearly a means for teachers to discuss their practice, ask questions, seek understanding and grow their professional practice and is valued so much by teachers that they seek out opportunities and recognize it as a major structure for their learning.

Although all of teachers explicitly identified that networking with colleagues or experts was one of the most beneficial means to improve instructional practice, it was surprising that in

today's age of technology only two teachers spoke to the benefits of connecting with other educators through the use of technology. Grassy Knoll Teacher A uses Facebook® to establish and/or join groups that share the same instructional beliefs and strategies. Through this connection with teachers from all over the country, she has been able to support an instructional philosophy that is only shared by one other teacher in her district but is used by teachers throughout the State of Wisconsin, the United States and all over the world. In addition to creating posts, she reads the posts of her colleagues, participates in live chats and has signed in and viewed someone sharing a particular technique. What has started as an online group has led to the Facebook® group setting up in-person meetings where they get together to dialog and support each other. Teacher A's participation was active not only within the social networking group for that instructional philosophy but she also stated she participates in several other educator groups that align with her instructional area. Only one other teacher, Grassy Knoll Teacher E, spoke about connecting to other educators through technology, although her connection was in a more passive role. Grassy Knoll Teacher E uses Twitter® and Facebook® to follow several educational blogs and certain educational research leaders. Reading their posts helps her to stay current in her practice because she learns new things from their posts which she can then decide if she would like to add to her instructional practice. The major focus for Teacher E's learning has been mindfulness. This is not an area of learning that is engaged in by many of her colleagues in her district. She has used social media outlets to follow speakers in the area of mindfulness. The use of technology as a means to discourse with colleagues offers an individual teacher an opportunity to network with a larger population of educators, especially educators who may have a unique niche focus that they incorporate in their instruction. Since the ability to network with teachers in their district is limited, these two teachers have been

creative in meeting their need for discourse with colleagues and have sought out online educator individuals or groups.

When engaging in more structured professional development activities such as district workshops, university coursework, or attendance at conferences or conventions; teachers have a clear preference for how the learning opportunity should be designed in order for the learning to be beneficial and to transfer back to a change in instructional practice. By far, teachers preferred professional learning that involved discourse with others. Seven teachers mentioned the opportunity for teachers to talk about what they are learning and how they are implementing the new learning into their practice as an important component of structured professional learning opportunities. Grassy Knoll Teacher C stated, “I find that I often learn as much from the networking as I do from presenters.” Clearly opportunities for discourse with colleagues is valued.

Along with engaging in discourse with colleagues, eight teachers preferred attending workshops, conference sessions or courses that involved some form of hands-on activity. The professional learning events that not only showed participants how to do something but actually had the participant engage in the activity were highly valued by these eight teachers. Grassy Knoll Teacher D highlighted one of the most meaningful learning experiences she had occurred when she went to observe an instructional practice in another classroom and that classroom teacher had her teach the strategy to a small group of students. Teacher D commented on how that experience helped her to successfully implement that strategy into her own instructional practice and increased her confidence in using it with her own students. Rocky Hill Teacher D reiterated the power in being able to do something that would impact her own students when she spoke about a final project for a class. Teacher D stated that the course instructor specifically

told the participants to choose a final project that they would actually use in their classrooms with students and not to do something just for the sake of completing an assignment and getting a grade. Teacher D felt this was valuable because not only did she use what she had learned, she had experience using that knowledge to support instruction and felt this led to her using this knowledge again because it was so successful with her students. “I’m pretty good at seeking out people who can help me, you know like if I find this is done in the classroom could it be done in mine but how would I make that work. I am not afraid to call people up and say this is what I am thinking, how could I use that in my classroom,” commented Grassy Knoll Teacher B. Her area of learning was in technology and she felt she strongly benefited from going to classes and bringing her device in order to actually engage in the activities that were being shown by the instructor. After the course finished, she would then seek out her colleagues to help her process the new learning and find ways to integrate the new technology learning into her classroom. For her, it was the combination of hands-on learning and the dialog with colleagues in order to embed that learning into her professional instructional practice. In fact, four teachers wanted both hands-on learning activities along with the ability to discourse with colleagues. Three of the teachers with the most teaching experience, 27 years or more, all valued hands-on learning activities with teacher discourse. Connecting with colleagues to discuss and share, hands-on engaged learning opportunities, or a combination of both were the most valued structures for learning.

Another opportunity for learning was through participation in district committees. Three teachers felt these opportunities enabled them to be on the front line of learning and also gave them leadership opportunities because they were responsible for taking the learning and information back to their school sites and sharing it with their colleagues. These three teachers

all valued collegiality and discourse as a primary means for learning. All three also named multiple areas that were focuses for their learning and multiple structures for learning. Their passion for continued growth was evident.

Other learning opportunities mentioned were specific to individuals and varied by their learning styles. Four individuals felt reading books or research on an instructional practice was beneficial to their individual learning. Attendance at conferences and listening to speakers was valued by four individuals. Finally, taking classes for credit in an area connected to their practice was also considered by four teachers as a means to grow professionally. As for the structure of these professional development opportunities, small sized classes, differentiation for participants, choice to attend, opportunities for reflection and longer duration of time were all preferred. These preferences did not have enough responses to draw meaningful insights regarding their use for professional development.

Interestingly, these same learning opportunities were listed by others as having little value for their own professional learning. Book studies, classes, reading journals, or one-day workshops were all mentioned as learning opportunities that offered little value. Rocky Hill Teacher E feels the one-day; dive-in and then implement on your own workshop structure is not conducive to learning. She compares it with “teaching something in one day to a student and then saying, ‘Okay you’ve got it now go!’” and how ineffective that is for students and realizes the same is true for adult learning. One participant commented on on-line courses being ineffective for his learning because of the format for discussions. Rocky Hill Teacher A feels that online discussions are not as rich as classes that have face-to-face interaction. He felt a disconnect with having to post a comment by a certain date and then having to respond to

someone else's post but never really going back to the discussion after that and not having the discussion truly evolve.

While some learning opportunities themselves had little value, there were some structural elements of professional development that were identified as having little value. Sessions that involved long periods of sitting and listening are not valuable to two teachers. These same teachers identified hands-on as their preferred learning structure. When the teacher goes too fast, or when the class is not what you expected, writing papers and listening to speakers who are not current were all specific structural components of professional development that are not valuable to the teachers who stated that discourse with colleagues was a valuable structure for their learning. Three of the participants felt they could take something away from every professional learning opportunity, even a validation of what they were already doing; others felt that was not enough. Again these preferences did not have enough responses to draw meaningful insights.

Support and Roadblocks for Individual Learning

Overwhelmingly, teachers felt supported on their learning journey by their building administrators. All but one participant felt the support of their administrator and district for their professional learning. The other ten participants felt they could discuss ideas for changing their practice with their administrator. Three teachers reported that their administrator helped them with funding, either through the use of the school site budget or by writing a grant to cover costs. When speaking about administrative support and district support for trying new instructional strategies, Rocky Hill Teacher D stated, “[The District] has been a good place to be in that way in that they really encourage you to try different things and they like you to take a couple of risks and they like you to keep to the curriculum obviously, but they are pretty good on that.” Grassy Knoll Teacher A also felt very supported by her district, “We have also been very encouraged to

be bold, to try new things, and I take that message seriously and instead of being complacent and doing things the way we always do, I would much rather try things and fail and that's how I want our kids to think too. Try things and fail instead of always doing what is safe because you never know when the next great idea is out there.”

The role of districts in supporting their teachers' independent learning varies. While Rocky Hill district does not reimburse for credits, the district still offers the steps and lanes pay structure that rewards teachers with extra pay for additional university credits earned or for obtaining a master's degree or Ph.D. Sandy Shore Administrator stated that he has building level funds that he can use to send people to professional development opportunities. The district also offers monetary incentives for teachers who complete a higher degree or obtain licensure like their 316 reading license. Grassy Knoll uses site budget or sometimes district budget monies to send people to conferences or workshops.

On the other hand, there were not any roadblocks that prevented teachers from expanding their learning. However, there were a few concerns. Grassy Knoll Teacher D felt the district was supportive of trying new things, but that doing so could be challenging and in conflict with the district expected outcomes. She shared, “Sometimes they encourage us to try them but on the flip side there are still certain tests and obligations from the district level that they expect us to do. So where there is that encouragement, ‘oh yeah, get out there and try it’, there is also that other piece of ‘well, but you still are obligated to do this district test even though you are trying something new’.” She went on to give this example, “So like they encourage you, that they encourage you if oh that student isn't strong in writing give them a chrome book and have them type it instead but then they can't do that for their final CBA (common based assessment) so when it comes to that final district test at the end of the trimester, then that kid is not successful

because they were not allowed to do it on the computer.” To her, this represented a lack of support and coherence to instruction. In the end, she did not feel this was in the best interest of student achievement and it caused her some concern about implementing new learning into her instructional practice. Sandy Shore Teacher A also faced an obstacle in her district. Once thing that she had embedded into her instruction was the use of drama productions. She felt they were powerful because some students who were not academically strong had an opportunity to shine in a performance. Teacher A stated that she was told to stop and the district even went so far as to close up the stage that was available at the school. She also felt the same lack of support as Grassy Knoll Teacher D felt from her district and felt that student achievement was negatively impacted from the loss of these types of activities. Rocky Hill Teacher A expressed frustration in that he joined a committee but felt that his voice and the voice of the other teachers on the committee was not really heard and it did not have an impact because the decision-making was top down from administration. He thought the committee was supposed to be more of a team decision-making unit, but that was not the reality of how he felt the committee worked. He now views his role is to inform the staff members, not to represent them. He also expressed concerns about his advisory that he needed for his university coursework to obtain an administrative license. He stated that his advisor was not always available and it was difficult to connect with him when he had questions or even to get paperwork signed. He felt a lack of collaboration with his advisor and would have valued some feedback on his work. For each of these individuals, their concerns went unheard by their administrators. These situations were clearly a negative to the relationship between the teacher and the administrator/school/district. However, there were no means for the teacher to share these concerns with the administration in order for the concerns to be further discussed. This lack of a format for teachers to share their concerns means that

teachers carry these concerns with them and the concerns did impact their overall attitude toward their ability to do their job to the best of their ability.

Rocky Hill Teacher E expressed concern for professional learning in the future based on the current political state of education. She expressed concerns over the fact that many teacher colleagues in other districts have lost steps and lanes on the teacher pay scale. Her concern was that fewer teachers would be continuing to take coursework or pursue an advanced degree from universities in order to continue to grow their practice. The elimination of steps and lanes ends financial compensation for taking courses or obtaining a Master's Degree, and since there is a cost to taking courses, she is concerned that fewer people will want to spend the money without being compensated. She stated, "But to my colleagues in other districts there is a disincentive to continue to grow as a practitioner. Part of it is the cost of it, part of it is their salaries are stagnant, and part of it is the outcome is that yes it is professional growth but you also want to be compensated for the work that you do and the education you have. So I think there are so many people for whom steps and lanes it's well, we used to have that. It's easy to say I'm not going to do that. It's like a personal affront to say well you're not going to pay me then I'm not going to get the education." Grassy Knoll Teacher D did state the cost of taking university credits and the fact that she was only six years into her teacher career, along with the additional costs of insurance and retirement, meant that she was putting off pursuing her master's degree. She felt the current political climate was discouraging for teachers. Rocky Hill Teacher D stated that the district was now requiring preapproval of any coursework taken to advance on the pay scale. She noted that there was no established criteria that was given to teachers about which courses would be approved and which would not be approved. This has left teachers feeling unsure of the process for approval of credits. These concerns, along with the license renewal process that

does not require coursework for continued learning, could potentially influence teachers in their individual professional learning. This could potentially lead to a decline in the number of teachers pursuing advanced degrees or impact decision making about degrees. Teachers may gravitate toward advanced degrees that have a financial benefit and avoid those that would only improve their instructional practice without a financial gain.

When commenting on collegial support, the responses were mixed. The three specialist teachers who participated in the study felt less support by their colleagues than colleagues who were academic based. Specialist teachers experienced isolation from colleagues who taught the same subject as they were usually the only person in their building who taught that subject area. It required more effort for them to arrange to meet with their specialty area colleagues in the district. Another concern was that they felt disconnected with academic area teachers because the academic teachers did not understand their subject area. While specialist teachers often sat through academic professional learning, it was rare that academic teachers were exposed to the curriculum or instructional strategies used in specialist areas. Two specialist teachers did share instances where they reached out to academic teachers to plan a joint unit that imbedded the academic content standards with the arts standards. In these cases, both teachers selectively chose the academic teacher they worked with in order for the unit to be successful with students. They looked for an academic teacher willing to put in the extra effort to plan and develop the instructional components and assessments for both the specialist and the academic standards. In each case, the specialist teacher felt the collaboration was successful and had personal as well as student achievement benefits.

Academic teachers spoke positively about the support and encouragement that they have received from their colleagues. The academic teachers mentioned ongoing collaboration and

teamwork. A willingness to listen and share ideas was repeated by seven of the respondents. In addition to the sharing of ideas, academic teachers expressed not only a willingness to hear feedback about their ideas but they embraced that feedback in order to refine their ideas and have a greater impact on students.

As far as identifying outside influences or other roadblocks, the most frequent response was time. Teachers felt that there is only so much time in a day and it can be overwhelming to balance the teaching and professional growth with personal lives. Four teachers expressed concern that there was not enough time built into the school day to collaborate with one another. This included concerns that many personal learning sessions are scheduled after a long day of work when they are not feeling as energized for their own learning. Grassy Knoll Teacher B shared, “You know it’s like my husband always says you could do this 24/7 and you would never be caught up and...I know but I feel it is so important but I feel like I have to find a balance. So I think time is it and knowing when to put it down, knowing when to stop thinking about it.”

The second outside roadblock involved cost. Teachers are feeling the pinch of their own pocketbooks when investing in their professional learning because of recent changes in Wisconsin that have teachers paying more for healthcare and retirement but only receiving cost of living raises. Districts have also felt the pinch of budget cuts and have not been able to pay for teachers to attend conventions or other professional development that is of interest to the teacher. The funding limits for districts combined with less take home pay for teachers has limited the opportunities for some teachers to access a variety of professional development opportunities.

Impact of Individual Learning on Student Achievement

Half of the teacher participants used some form of data to determine whether their professional learning that was implemented into instructional practice was having an impact on student achievement. These teachers looked at district assessments, such as common based assessments, in order to determine growth. These assessments are given across the district to students in the same grade level for the same content areas. In other cases, the district used purchased testing programs that were normed across various populations throughout the country. Teachers reported more students reaching the proficiency level than in previous years. They also reported that over 80% of their students reached the proficiency level, which was the goal for student achievement. Others used pre and post assessments to determine student growth. In these cases, over 80% of the students showed growth. Grassy Knoll Teacher D has focused her learning on improving the reading abilities of her students. She has tried different interventions in order to support struggling readers and says, “I do data track it then so I know is this going to work or is this not working.” She uses the data to make instructional decisions for her students. In addition, one teacher used IEP progress to measure achievement. She reviewed student progress toward meeting IEP goals and meeting with teachers and parents every 6-8 weeks in order to discuss goals and where the students currently were in meeting their goals. Teachers who used data had concrete evidence of student learning.

Half of the respondents spoke about using non-assessment measures to determine student achievement. Two teachers shared that other people had made comments about their students’ knowledge. Grassy Knoll Teacher B stated that she was given feedback from a guest speaker who had come in to talk to the students about staying healthy. The guest speaker commented that of the many classroom visits at various schools that she conducts, the students in this class

were far more knowledgeable about the topic. Grassy Knoll Teacher A shared, “I have a middle school teacher who my kids feed into and she says she can tell exactly which kids are from my class and I asked her how can she tell and she said they can come up with ideas. They know how to think.” Teacher A felt this was a great testament about her efforts in trying to make sure her students were independent thinkers and learners. While no assessment was conducted in either scenario, both scenarios involved other adults acknowledging a difference in abilities based upon their observations of a wide variety of students.

Two other teachers used their own observations about student growth to determine the effectiveness of professional development strategies that were implemented into practice. Regarding the emotional growth of her students based on her implementation of mindfulness strategies, Teacher E at Grassy Knoll stated, “I saw them grow emotionally. My students became better able to handle frustration, better able to handle, um, situations that at the beginning of the year that they were constantly seeking out my help for, simple things...By mid-year I was noticing a decrease in those types of complaints and they were choosing to ignore those types of things or choosing to use their words and tell the person, ‘You know, I really don’t like it when you do that.’” Another example is Rocky Hill Teacher A, who felt he was able to make better connections with students because of the focus for his professional learning on urban education. Teacher A voiced, “I can relate to them in a better sense and there’s just a way of connecting with them and making them feel like school is a positive place to be in and sometimes there isn’t a positive place in some of their lives and it’s hard to get them to feel that this is the one place they can feel secure and safe.” He continued, “I think once I make that connection and they feel like they are comfortable with me and they feel like I am someone they can trust I get more out of them academically, emotionally, behaviorally, all across the board.”

In both cases, teachers used their observations to determine the impact of their professional learning on students.

In addition, two teachers responded to evidence of student achievement by referring to increases in student engagement in learning activities and increases in confidence and social skills. Rocky Hill Teacher E gave this example, “I am teaching summer school right now and I have a group of 3 classes and I have about 8 kids in each class. I am just teaching math. They don’t see themselves as math students. They are self-determined that they can’t do math. If in 20 days, that is all I have in summer school, they walk out and say, ‘I like math’ then I have impacted achievement.” Another way to assess the impact of professional learning on student achievement was through increasing the skills of support staff. Rocky Hill Teacher A connected his learning in administrative leadership to increased skills in observing and giving feedback about instruction. He felt he had become better able to supervise his aides and give them feedback to improve their instructional techniques which has impacted their work with students. Finally, two teachers did not speak to any evidence that student learning was being impacted. While only four teachers included student achievement within their definitions of professional development, nine of the eleven teachers use some form of data: assessments, feedback from others, observations, change in student attitudes or motivation, or change in others in their interactions with students; in order to determine if learning implemented from professional development was having an impact on student achievement.

When it comes to individual professional learning, there are some clear themes that emerge from the 11 teachers. While only four teachers included student achievement in their definition of professional development, it is clear that student achievement impacts the thoughts and decisions of teachers. Teachers choose topics for professional learning based upon their

students. Population demographics, content and needs all influence teacher choice for their learning. Teachers also used student achievement to determine whether their learning was having an impact. Another emerging theme is the need for discourse and hands-on learning opportunities. Despite the differences in preferred structures of learning, discourse and hands-on were valued. Discourse was valued within other professional development structures and as a stand-alone structure for learning. Additionally, teachers reported support from administrators and colleagues for their learning. However, time and cost were mentioned as deterrents to professional development. Teachers need opportunities for learning built into their work day or at times when they are ready for learning. They are also concerned about costs associated with continuing to grow their practice in the face of the current funding for schools and teacher salaries. Overall, teachers understood the need to continue their professional growth and engaged in learning opportunities in order to continually improve their practice.

School District Professional Development

Administrator View of Professional Development in the District

The three elementary school administrators were asked about professional development and its role in the district and school. All three felt professional development was a strength for the district and was being used as a primary strategy for school improvement.

The Grassy Knoll Administrator stated that the district established a number of goals and professional development is being used to meet those goals. He also said schools in the district analyzed their own data, established school goals and used professional development to meet those goals. When asked the purpose of professional development in the district, Grassy Knoll Administrator responded that the district looked to professional development to help teachers grow professionally and be able to implement strategies in order to increase student achievement.

Professional development topics in the district are determined by surveying teachers to find their interests, analyzing data and based upon district initiatives.

The Sandy Shore Administrator thought professional development was used by the district to start a new initiative or new practice that the district expects their teachers to implement. He also spoke about conducting needs assessments and using the results to determine areas or identify staff members needing additional professional development. When asked about the purpose of professional development, Sandy Shore Administrator also stated that the purpose was to grow the instructional practices of teachers in order to improve student learning. Needs assessments are the main tool used for determining the different topics for professional learning.

Visioning and strategic planning had been a main focus for the district according to the Rocky Hill Administrator. The impetus for the visioning and strategic planning process actually stemmed from the professional development that was happening in the district. The main focus for professional development at the elementary level was initiated by a teacher led desire to embrace an initiative and adopt it across the district at the elementary level. That led to the district adoption of authentic learning as its main focus and the incorporation of authentic learning into its vision and strategic plan. The Rocky Hill Administrator identified the purpose of professional development as continual improvement. He stated, "One of the things that struck me is we have plenty of teachers here who are 20 year vets, 25 year vets, 15 year vets, etcetera, but all of them you know have expressed excitement and enthusiasm in a desire to get better. They're not saying I already know how to do this and I don't want to be bothered in the last couple of years in my career to have to take on something new. So I think there is really an orientation towards continuous improvement in our district and in our school." When asked

whether he felt this excitement and enthusiasm was due to a grass roots effort by the teachers, he felt that he teachers would say absolutely it is because they had a voice. However, he sees the reality as there were still challenges to implementation regardless of the mindset of the teachers. Since the school and district have adopted this authentic learning initiative, most of the professional development needs were determined by the implementation of the initiative. In addition, he stated that there were also some other needs that have been identified for professional development based upon changes in the district in terms of support materials and technology.

All three of the districts looked to professional development as a means to continue to develop the skills and talents of their teaching staff. The Grassy Knoll and Sandy Shore Administrators connected the purpose for the growth to student achievement. While needs were identified through several different means, all the districts used professional development to address the needs of the district.

Professional Development at Grassy Knoll's School and District

One of the ways Grassy Knoll teachers received professional development was through school sessions. Grassy Knoll has one hour every month to bring the staff together to conduct professional development in an area determined by the school. The amount of time dedicated to school professional development has decreased over the past years as the district has taken a larger role in structuring professional development. For school sessions, the school analyzes their data to determine professional development topics or teacher input is used to determine topics. Teachers A and B did not mention the monthly school sessions as a means for receiving professional development. Teachers C and E had negative opinions on these school sessions.

Teacher C: "I don't have any direct proof but I feel like the current structure has had a negative impact on student achievement. In the past when we had more

regularly scheduled building and district professional development, we were able to share information more quickly and provide more consistent feedback. We were also able to cover more topics within a year which led to quicker implementation of building wide initiatives and changes.”

Teacher E: “The first Tuesday of every month we have building professional development where our administrator picks the topic and guides it. Sometimes I don’t think that those are the best use of our time. For example, this week they went through best instructional practices and they were done in a half an hour and I feel like things like that, more time could certainly be devoted to it, more time could certainly be spent on it. So it’s almost kind of frustrating that you stayed for that extra half hour and didn’t really get a whole lot out of it. So I guess I would say that those building led professional developments are the least impactful.”

Teacher D had a mixed response, stating, “The hour professional development that we do once a month that are either led by someone in our building or our principal um usually I find them worthwhile because they usually pertain to something that is going on within the building or something that we have requested to hear more about.” Teacher D also stated that sometimes that building professional development time is used as a work session for the teachers to work on their student learning outcome, which is part of their evaluation process under Educator Effectiveness. During those sessions, the principal will make himself available for teachers who have questions or need support. Overall, the monthly building professional development sessions do not seem to have a strong impact on the professional learning and growth of educators at Grassy Knoll.

All other professional learning is offered by the district. This professional development occurred in two structures: one that is planned during the work day and the other that occurs outside the work day. Prior to the start of the school year, the district set aside one and one-half days for professional development to be used as district administration saw fit. In addition, two days each year the district cancelled school for students and the district planned professional development for the entire day. The structure for those days included a combination of guest

speakers and grade level specific trainings. Those district sessions had mixed reviews by teachers in regards to their value. Teacher B did not mention the district sessions as sources of professional development.

Teacher A: “This one that we just went, and [speaker name] has been talked up a lot, and it was a little bit of a letdown. It was a good message, but it was so old school and then you know I heard it for the first time and it was a good message so I didn’t mind it but some people had been there for the fourth time and it was the exact same message.”

Teacher C: “The half day offerings are nice, but they put hundreds of teachers into an auditorium at the beginning of the school year or on parent/teacher conference days when teachers are preoccupied. I wish we would have additional professional development days. I feel that smaller, interactive sessions have more impact/value, especially when they can be accompanied by coaching.”

Teacher D: “I would say that usually if we do an entire district whole day or half day conference or something like that...I usually find those to be beneficial”

Teacher E: “The times they have brought in guest speakers...you know those were impactful as well just in a different way. I prefer when I am choosing my own professional development because they tend to be smaller groups and I feel like I get more out of that than a large presentation from a speaker. Not that I didn’t get anything out of those it’s just my personal preference to be more in a small group.”

While the results were mixed as to the value, Teacher A did feel comforted by the fact that the district had teachers complete surveys and sought feedback about the professional development offered. She stated, “I think our district is trying to be really good and really receptive to hear if we’ve liked it or not liked it. To be really honest I don’t think we would be poo-pooed if say we don’t like something.” The district appeared to be placing a value on professional development through the use of feedback from teachers. However, it was unclear how that feedback was used by the district or if it was used at all.

When asked about professional development for a new curriculum resource adoption, teachers stated that there was not a consistent practice. Teacher D explained the practice as,

“There will be some type of small training where they show us, because now everything has that online component with it so they will show us here is where you can find X, Y and Z that you will need. Sometimes they do more than that. Sometimes they give it to you and say good luck. And then there is also professional development that if you want to go to it you can go to it.”

For the first time in her five years with the district, Teacher E said she was required to attend a district professional development session on a new material adopted for use with students. She elaborated, “It is a big frustration for people when the money is spent on this [materials adoption] and the expectation is that you use it but there are people who don’t use it. And that is a big frustration and why people chose not to use it I don’t know but I think that some people are frustrated that some people are not using it.” Clearly a disconnect exists between the district and the teachers on the need for training in the use of resource materials. Teachers appear to value training on resource materials but the district has no set procedure for the delivery of the professional development that will support teachers in their use of the materials.

The major focus for professional development in the district was an on-line catalog of professional development workshops that teachers can sign up for. The district required the staff to complete a minimum of 10 hours of professional development. These offerings, held after school or on Saturdays, were taught by teachers, administrators, learning coaches or curriculum and instruction personnel who were currently employed by the district. The individual who led the professional development session designed their session but were encouraged to use discussions and active engagement when presenting material. This was a connection to discourse and hands-on learning that teachers identified as the best structures for their independent learning. Teachers could sign up for the sessions they wanted to attend, however, their building administrator had to approve their choice. Teachers who were in their first two

years of employment with the district were required to take the new teacher institute sessions in order to learn about district initiatives and expectations for instruction, but they could also take other sessions of interest. The response was very positive to this professional development opportunity, especially having choice in their learning.

Teacher A: “We have a lot of control of our learning in our district which has been really nice. I appreciate that you are able to pick the ones that mean the most to you. That is kind of how professional development has changed from everyone doing the same thing to making it relevant for you and your teaching.”

Teacher B: “I think it is important that I have some control over what I pick to attend because I think there is no way you can advance everyone at the same pace, not everybody is at the same place for learning. I like that I have the choice and I can pick and choose what I am learning. We are supposed to have 10 hours, I have way more than that. If I see something that is interesting to me, I’ll just go and when I am there I will think, ‘Hey, this is interesting. Can I use it? Hey I learned a couple of things that I didn’t know’”

Teacher C: “I believe it is up to individuals to decide how much and what types of professional development they choose to be a part of. They also choose how actively they want to participate and whether they are open to integrating the new ideas into practice.”

Teacher D: “As far as the ones we get to pick, some of them are incredibly beneficial ... I usually pick like the hour long or two hour long session on something that I like to try implementing in my classroom.”

Teacher E: “I think because I can choose what I want to do, for the most part they all have been impactful because I am choosing what I want to do. I prefer when I am choosing my own professional development because they tend to be smaller groups and I feel like I get more out of that than a large presentation from a speaker.”

This “catalog” of professional development sessions came about due to results from a district survey. For several years the lowest scoring item the survey asked whether teachers felt the professional development offered by the district was relevant to their practice. The continual low responses prompted the district to change the way it offered professional development and provide teachers with more choice. It also allowed the district to differentiate professional

development to meet the needs of a variety of teachers in a variety of subject areas. The Grassy Knoll Administrator stated that principals can assign teachers to take certain classes if they feel a teacher's practice is lacking in a certain area. The teachers at Grassy Knoll all reported that they felt having choice for their professional learning and growth was empowering.

Teachers at Grassy Knoll reported a connection between the learning occurring during the sessions offered in the catalog and changes to instructional practice. When asked about the impact of these professional development opportunities on her practice, Teacher A responded, "I think many of the professional developments are to help us to be better teachers. I think that is the number one goal for that and to keep us relevant. I feel that I try a lot of things and they are all going to help learning." All respondents tried to pick sessions which they felt would impact their instruction and most felt there were enough offerings that matched their interest and/or needs that they had no trouble filling at least 10 hours. Teacher E commented that these professional development opportunities impacted her practice because "it forces me to take a look harder at my own self and how well I am sticking to that curriculum and how well I am using it." She also sees an impact on student achievement because she has taken back what she has learned in professional development, used it in her classroom and her student's assessment scores have improved. Teacher C also noted an increase in student achievement scores but also feels that the professional development in the district has renewed enthusiasm in staff members, which impacts their instruction and student achievement. Teacher B shared that the flexibility of the types of offerings was very beneficial for specialist teachers. The district allowed specialists to earn professional development hours for meeting with teachers who teach in a special area. This allowed the teachers, who typically work isolated in a school, to meet with their specialist colleagues across the district to discuss topics pertaining to their area and to share ideas, ask

questions, and support one another. Finally, Teacher D stated that when she learned something in the professional development session she really tried to take the next steps and implement that learning into her professional practice and then tried to track the impact by collecting data: whether she did an assessment of some type or just observed and dialoged with students or looked at responses from student surveys. This district professional development structure appeared to be embraced by teachers and made an impact upon their instructional practice. In addition, all teachers felt supported by administration in using what they had learned in their classrooms.

While all of the teachers responded that they used some form of assessment to check for student learning, whether an attitude survey or a measure of academic learning, the district also evaluated professional learning based upon student assessments. The Grassy Knoll Administrator stated that if student assessment scores go up, it validated the professional development that was happening. If there was no impact on student learning, the district tried to find out why and checked to see if professional development was being implemented universally and appropriately. A district Instructional Improvement Committee regularly met to review data and made decisions about professional development. The Grassy Knoll Administrator reflected on professional development saying, “If it’s good professional development; that can fire up teachers. If its quality professional development, it reinvigorates the teacher and gives them things they want to go back to their classrooms and try the next day or the next week.”

District accountability for professional development occurred when administrators approved courses that teachers selected. Another accountability factor was the use of academic learning coaches. The role of the coaches was to coach teachers and provide support on professional development. Another role was to go into classrooms and work with students who

were struggling or needed enrichment. Interestingly, only one teacher commented on the role of the instructional coach. Teacher D stated,

We do have an academic learning coach but she is spread between all six grades so it makes her job very hard. During the week she takes the three bottom lowest math students and she does an RtI lesson with them. And she does try to make time, like I have co-taught with her once um but other than that like she is swamped she has so much to do. On a regular week I would say I would pop in and say, 'Hey, I need help with this' and she will give me some resources but that is about it. That's the hard part, she wants to be in our classrooms helping us but she is spread way too thin. She does all of the RtI sessions, she has district meetings constantly, she does all of the data collection for all of our students here for our Star, she does the initial AIMSWEB probe to find out what our RtI groups look like, I mean who is the bottom three. She has an insane job. I would say there is definitely a flaw in the system.

There appears to be a disconnect for the defined role of the academic learning coach between the district and teachers. It could account for the fact that only one teacher connected the role of the Academic Learning Coach to her professional development.

Finally, the Grassy Knoll Administrator was asked about the outcomes of professional learning in the district. He stated that test scores increased and that the growth students showed in scores was related to the best practices that teachers implemented in classrooms. On the negative side, he felt that too many things were implemented at one time. He felt professional development topics that did not have follow up or did not have the ground work laid before implementation led to little investment by the teaching staff and did not result in a change to practice.

Professional Development at Sandy Shore's School and District

Sandy Shore district looked at the results of a needs assessment, which was heavily based on student achievement data, in order to determine professional development needs at the district level. The district had set aside two days before the school year started, two half days during the school year and two days during the summer for professional development. The professional

development prior to the start of the school year was typically to introduce a new initiative or instructional practice that the district wanted to see the teachers begin to use. While fidelity was not expected right away, it was an expectation for the teachers to begin to implement the learning into their practice. The half days were used as a stop gap measure in order to address a concern that was identified from data and which professional development can reverse. For the past two years, teachers were also required to do some professional development over the summer. These summer offerings were more of an “a la carte” in that there were a number of offerings and teachers chose which sessions they attended based on an area they wanted to grow their practice or where they needed additional support. The choices for summer included both district offered selections taught by district administrators and teachers or attendance at a conference or summit. Those choices were very flexible so teachers could attend around their summer plans. In addition, the district used a Building Leadership Team (BLT) structure. The BLTs met at the district level four times a year for professional development and then took what they learned back to the schools and shared during staff meetings or Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings. Staff meetings occurred every other week for an hour before the school day started. PLCs met weekly, mainly as grade level teams, for one and one-half hours. Finally, the district offered sessions on an as needed basis. As an example, the district saw a need for more training on reading interventions so the district reading specialists worked with teachers in the schools by presenting information in a one and one-half hour session after school. All of these structures were used for district driven professional development.

Professional development within the district varied in length. The Sandy Shore Administrator termed some of the professional development as “parachute professional development.” He identified those opportunities as one or two day sessions where the teachers

received training and the district hoped that it was enough for the teachers to implement the new learning into their practice. The other model was the “pay it forward” model used with the BLTs. In this model, the BLT received the professional development in a half-day session and then had the afternoon to plan how to pay it forward to all of the staff members in the building through staff and PLC meetings. Sandy Shore Teacher A felt the professional developments led by the BLT were beneficial because they engaged the staff in activities which then enabled them to be more successful in implementing the new learning within instructional practice. Teachers also had the option to write their Student Learning Outcomes for their Educator Effectiveness evaluation based upon areas of professional development identified by the district and delivered through the BLT.

Differentiation for staff members was minimal. Teachers had choice in the offerings they selected for the two required days in the summer. Teachers used this time to explore learning in an area which they felt best impacted their practice. However, during the school year all of the professional development was the same for everyone. Sandy Shore Teacher A stated that sometimes the professional development sessions become redundant because staff turnover had forced the district to continue to focus on some of the same things. There was some differentiation for new teachers. New hires attended a week long training prior to the start of the school year in order to become knowledgeable about district initiatives and instructional practices. For the remainder of professional development opportunities, new teachers received the same as returning staff. District staff who led professional development opportunities were encouraged to scaffold their instructional delivery in order to meet the needs of all learners. Specialists were expected to participate in the district professional development opportunities. In

addition, the Sandy Shore Administrator says he looked for conferences or conventions to send his specialists in order for them to stay current in their practice and learn in their specific area.

In addition to the use of BLT, the district valued building a PLC environment. PLC meetings followed the DuFour Model for PLC structure. Grade level teams based discussions around three questions: 1). What do we want our students to know and be able to do? 2). How will we know when we get there? And 3). What will we do if they don't? School was released early on Wednesdays so that PLC teams had a longer time to meet. During this time grade level teams discussed instructional practice, made adjustments to common formative assessments, looked at assessment data, or determined the next steps for instruction of students. Special education teachers were assigned to a grade level team. Specialist teachers across the district met together during this time as well and discussed instruction in their specific areas. Sandy Shore Teacher A thought the use of PLCs was very powerful. According to her, "I take an idea to the team and sit down and a good idea becomes a great idea." During her grade level PLC meetings, the teachers took ownership of the learning of all the students in the grade level. They looked at the scores for all the students in order to determine who had mastered the learning and who needed additional time and then made decisions about what needed to happen next. She felt there was no way that would happen without that structure and the structure helped her to improve her instructional practice.

In addition to being used for district professional development, staff meetings and PLC meetings were also times to address building concerns. As an example, after data was reviewed, the Sandy Shore Administrator noticed an issue in reading comprehension scores. He decided to do a book study with the staff on comprehension strategies. The Sandy Shore Administrator used modeling and feedback in order to lead the book study and hold teachers

accountable to embed their new learning into practice. The Sandy Shore Administrator worked with the reading specialist to meet with staff during one PLC meeting each month. During that time, they modeled what the practices looked like. Then he observed in classrooms and gave feedback to teachers about his observations. Eventually staff came to him and asked him to observe and give feedback on specific lessons they were teaching. Throughout the implementation period, school data was reviewed to determine the impact of professional learning on student achievement. This incorporated the use of discourse and hands-on learning that teachers identified as beneficial to support a change of practice. After a year of focused attention toward reading comprehension strategies, the data showed improvement in that area. The Sandy Shore Administrator stated he would fit in school identified professional development needs around the district schedule.

Various forms of data were used for accountability and to determine effectiveness of the professional development. Sandy Shore Administrator felt that Educator Effectiveness enabled him to visit more classrooms to see what was happening and provide feedback to teachers. These observations were one form of data that was collected. Teacher attendance data was used to make sure teachers were meeting the requirement for professional development, especially for the summer sessions. Student assessment data was used to determine the effectiveness of the professional development. A combination of data from the Wisconsin Forward Exam, Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) or Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS), and grade level district trimester common assessments were used as measures of student achievement. Sandy Shore Teacher A also spoke to the heavy emphasis on using data to make instructional decisions. When talking about the connection between analysis of data and student achievement she stated, “Raise the bar and you’ll see the kids rise to it.”

In addition to using administrator observation, teacher attendance and student achievement results; the district contracted with two outside consultants to provide coaching in the areas of mathematics and literacy. The consultants rotated around the various schools and various grade levels based upon the data. Three times a year the consultant visited and then met with the teachers involved. The classroom observations were recorded and during the meetings the recordings were viewed and discussed. The Sandy Shore Administrator stated that the teachers were often harder on themselves and found more areas for improvement than those identified by the consultants. The district focus for this was changing as the district looked at the reading specialists to take on more of the consulting role.

The positive outcome from professional development in the district, according to the Sandy Shore Administrator, was the fact that the district was very conscientious about not taking teachers out of their classrooms for professional development so that no days of instruction were missed. He also felt the district was very flexible and that the staff had responded to professional development very positively. According to the feedback from teachers that had been collected, the teachers especially liked the choice that they were afforded for the summer sessions. Teachers also had been very open when the Sandy Shore Administrator recommended that the teacher attend a particular session.

Professional Development at Rocky Hill's School and District

Rocky Hill's district identified authentic learning as its primary initiative. At the elementary level, that led to a contract with EL Education® for professional development and the implementation of Expeditionary Learning. The contract with EL Education® funded professional development activities and time with an Expeditionary Learning school designer for support of the implementation process. The contract included 25 days with the school designers

and 40 person days of attendance at EL Education® sites or trainings. Expeditionary Learning focused on project based learning with the teacher drawing together learning opportunities from multiple content areas to work on a real world project. Expeditions were typically semester long projects that included community service, field study, and work with experts. Typically expeditions were broken into parts called case studies and they culminated with an exposition that showcased the learning. While this initiative is the main focus for professional development, the Rocky Hill Administrator also noted that the district has other areas of focus that also required ongoing professional development such as the adoption of a new elementary mathematics resource; the change to new software for their student information system for such things as attendance, grading and report cards; and implementation for the state initiative around Response to Intervention (RtI). After previously eliminating early release on Wednesdays across the district, the Board and Superintendent listened to the elementary administrators and teachers and brought those back at the elementary level. The district recognized that the same structures do not work at all levels so allowed the elementary schedule to be different from the middle and high school level, provided the required hours of instruction were met. The district planned to use early release time, in which the students are dismissed 90 minutes before the regular dismissal time, to focus on the Expeditionary Learning implementation two times a month. In addition, one Wednesday early release had been dedicated to collaboration around Expeditionary Learning which would allow teachers to plan lessons, and one had been dedicated to other district initiatives. Expeditionary Learning required that a work plan be developed each year and the work plan outlined the areas of focus for professional development. The district challenge was that the district has never mandated a set work day for their teachers. Teachers were expected to complete their duties as professionals but there was no set time that they must work

other than when the students are in session. Administrators planned for sessions to be one and one-half or two hours and they have stressed to the teachers that their attendance at these sessions was expected in order for the professional development sessions to be most impactful.

Currently, most Expeditionary Learning professional development was led by teachers. The teachers received a listing of trainings that they could choose to attend. These trainings were actually site visits to schools that had been implementing Expeditionary Learning. Teachers completed site visits over the course of one to three days, depending on the focus for the learning. Usually a group of two teachers from the school were joined by two teachers from the other district elementary school and attended a site visit together. After the teacher team returned to the school, they met with the Expeditionary Learning school designer and planned the professional learning session. They then taught what they learned to the rest of the staff in an afterschool session that lasted anywhere from one to one and one-half hours. Typically different teachers volunteered to attend site visits on different topics and everyone had the opportunity to volunteer. The expectation was that the teachers came back to the school and shared what they learned. The focus for the current year was building community through Expeditionary Learning's morning CREW® meetings and integrating learning targets into instructional practice. One major issue for the district was the undefined work day which meant teachers could not be required to attend the full after school professional development session. Despite that issue, the structure had positive reviews from staff.

Teacher A: "Everything we have done this year in staff meetings and professional development wise has been through other staff members and not through administrators which has been relaxing and a little bit better. It's more of an involvement because you have teachers that are doing it and they know how staff meetings have been ran before, sometimes just a lot of administrators talking at you and how boring that can be and I think that when you get teachers to do it themselves it is more engaging and there is more opportunities to collaborate and

talk to your peers when teachers have been running the professional development rather than administration has been at least in the past.”

Teacher D: “At our staff meeting we have set up a museum walk so every grade set up a few examples of a project they were doing and we got to see what everyone was doing. So we really just need more time to talk just to find out what we are doing and what it details. We had never taken the time, been given the time. I think that is so valuable to find out what is happening in your building and then asking how did you structure that? How did you get started? So I am hoping that we can do more of that.”

Teacher E: “So when I did a site visit this year and I got to create the presentation, not only did I get to experience it but then I relived it and I taught it that was most impactful for me.”

Teacher A had also taken advantage of the model and been involved in visiting a site and planning and leading a professional development session for the rest of the staff. While this structure seemed to be well received, if a staff member missed the staff meeting where the information was presented, there was no plan in place to ensure that staff member was exposed to the new learning. Not having a plan for absent teachers was an even bigger issue when compounded with the fact that administrators could not require teacher attendance at staff meetings.

Another form of professional development came through the Expeditionary Learning school designer. One learning opportunity with the school designer took place during the school day and Rocky Hill Administrator brought in substitute teachers to cover the grade level teachers. Grade level teams had an opportunity to meet with the Expeditionary Learning school designer to talk about implementation of new learning or to plan lessons or expeditions. Other times the school designer delivered professional development directly to teachers in an after school session. None of the teachers spoke about working with the school designer to help them grow professionally.

Teachers identified professional development that has been least impactful for their practices. Three teachers were frustrated by redundancy of professional development.

Teacher A: “I think the activities that have had the least amount of value have been some of our repetitive discussions that we have had. So, um, for instance, ah, we have been doing morning meetings this is only my third year but they have been doing morning meetings for years here beforehand and so we had a bunch of different professional developments on CREW® which is basically like our morning meeting that you do in a circle only it is supposed to be smaller and I think we got a lot of training and professional development on how CREW® was ran and a lot of us felt like that we were pretty secure in that and we thought that was a strength of ours and we know how to do that to begin the morning and um we were just getting a lot of repetitive feedback and we were getting just the same message over and over again. We got a lot of EL Education® pushback on EL Education® members coming in and working on CREW® and we thought that was just a waste of time that we could have used somewhere else.”

Teacher B: “Two, three, four years ago we started discussing this and we put things into place of what we wanted for the school and now that we are established with becoming Expeditionary Learning, we are doing it all over again. I thought we would move forward from where we were with them but now we have to do it with them all over again the same discussions, the same this and that and I have a hard time with redundancy and putting so much time in because there are so many other things I could be doing.”

Teacher E: “We are getting to that point where all we are doing is Expeditionary Learning for the sake of Expeditionary Learning and I’ll just talk about I don’t think it is personalized enough. I don’t know what you know about Expeditionary Learning but there is 162 schools across the nation and they have been around for 20 or so years. This isn’t a fly by night organization but typically when there are brand new charters, they are rescuing a building of staff and there isn’t a lot of evidence for coming into a highly successful school. So their formula of in year one you do this, and year two you do this, and year three you do this doesn’t feel good to me because it doesn’t honor what we already do, it doesn’t honor what we already have and we were told don’t worry you can personalize it.”

Teacher C found the professional development to be “worthless” because of the structure of her class. As a specialist teacher, she only has 30 minutes with each group of students and feels implementing the community building activities from CREW® does not allow her time within the 30 minutes to meet the standards for the curriculum she is required to teach. She feels attending the sessions has “harmed” her practice because it takes away from the time she is able

to spend planning for instruction. Teacher D has been concerned about the time that the district dedicates to professional development. She felt in the past the district did not set aside enough time for the professional development in order for the teachers to feel really comfortable with implementing the new learning into practice. She stated, “With this Expeditionary Learning training we used to have this early release days . . . so we lost it this year and EL Education® was really surprised because they were going to use that time for professional development. And then they had to restructure how they were going to do it through out the school year. And that is kind of a typical thing so we have this big new initiative and we kind of took away the time we were really going to use to do it. We have it back next year I think because we need it.”

Teachers at Rocky Hill valued professional development that was meaningful for their practice.

All teachers are exposed to the professional development and it is the expectation of the administrator and district that teachers will use what they have learned in their classrooms. Differentiation occurs based on where the individual teachers are in their journey to implement Expeditionary Learning. Some teachers get support from the school designer in implementing basic underlying components like building an environment for learning or establishing learning targets, while others are working on developing case studies that build into an expedition. This also involves teacher choice in identifying what area they would like to develop and what kind of support they need. Interestingly, none of the teachers addressed the work that they did with the EL Education® school designer when discussing school based professional development. They did not seem to view this as professional development. When it came to whole staff sessions however, Teacher E felt more attention should be paid to differentiating, stating, “When I am just receptive and you know the kindergarten crew goes and says here is what I learned about a kindergarten classroom, those are some of those times I respect my colleagues, I respect the

information they have gathered but at the same time my time could be better spent doing X, Y, Z, so the irony of that is I am saying what I do and I learned the most from was when I am presenting and my colleagues may say didn't help me at all. So how we personalize it to make sure we are all getting something from it is not lost on me.”

Accountability for professional development occurs during a mid-year and end of the year review. For the mid-year review, the school leadership team reviewed the work plan and then went into classrooms and conducted observations looking for the implementation of the components of the professional development. Student focus groups met in order to get student input on what was happening in the classrooms. Staff received feedback from the data that was collected. Teacher A was part of the leadership team that participated in the walk through observations. He was hoping the walk through opportunities would increase so that all staff would have the opportunity to not only observe in someone's classroom but also have a conversation about what was observed. Where the mid-year review involved looking at the work plan that had been developed for the year and evaluating the school's progress toward meeting their work plan goals, the end of the year review involved EL Education® assessing the standards set by EL Education® for full implementation and becoming an Expeditionary Learning School. The end of the year review was more about holding the school accountable for their implementation as a whole, not as individual teachers. For the end of the year review, teachers were asked to complete a self-assessment and a school assessment. Those assessments were sent in to EL Education® and the school would receive the compiled data back for their review. Currently, there was no connection between teacher evaluations for Educator Effectiveness and implementation of Expeditionary Learning although the Rocky Hill Administrator stated that as he completed classroom observations he highlighted incidents when

he saw a teacher apply his/her learning from the Expeditionary Learning professional development.

From the perspective of the teacher, there were several things that hindered the implementation of new learning from professional development. Teachers felt time was a real roadblock. While time was dedicated to the professional development sessions after school, there was not dedicated time for teachers to meet together to plan. This really drove the motivation for teachers to have the early release time on Wednesdays reinstated. Teacher A stated that he was not given a common planning time to meet with the teachers he works with to discuss his students. He stated the teachers had to give up their prep time or time before or after school time in order to meet with him. His definition of prep time did not include teachers meeting together to discuss students and plan for their learning. Teacher D also felt not enough time was dedicated for teachers to feel comfortable and confident in using the new learning in their classrooms. Teacher A also mentioned that lack of departmental meetings across the district to connect between elementary, middle and high schools to make a fluid transition for students. Teacher B stated that the district used to offer classes outside of the school day which she felt had been really beneficial to her professional growth. These were no longer being offered by the district and Teacher B felt their loss had a negative impact on her own professional development. Teacher C agrees. She feels the loss of being able to have choice in their professional development has made much of the learning irrelevant to her subject area of instruction. The desire for more time to meet matches the value teachers placed on discourse for their own personal learning. The Rocky Hill teachers felt they could use more time for discourse with colleagues. The teachers also did not feel they had choice in their learning, even though

they were key in the adoption of Expeditionary Learning as a district initiative. Choice was another area identified by teachers as important to their independent learning.

When asked about the impact of professional development on student achievement, the Rocky Hill Administrator admitted that the school did not have a well-developed method for connecting the implementation of Expeditionary Learning to student achievement. In the past, the school had tried to tie results from Measures of Academic Progress® (MAP) testing into their work plan but they did not feel that MAP scores were the best indicators of the direction they are headed with Expeditionary Learning. While the school and district felt that finding a way to measure student achievement relevant to professional development and implementation of authentic learning was a priority, the Board of Education had also stated that they wanted to spend half of their Board meeting time focused on data. The Board wanted to see data on academic mastery, authentic learning, character and citizenship, and wellness. The District has made these initiatives its main focus and the Board wanted data that showed the impact the programming was having on students. Teacher E shared that the rationale for choosing Expeditionary Learning was to allow students to be in the driver's seat as learners. She stated, "Most appealing was the true integration of learning. So through project based learning kids will push themselves to read things they would never read because they want to learn X, they will do data analysis for real reasons not because on page 27 of the math book it says analyze this graph, what does it say. It is kind of that focus on the real world application of learning. It's like I have to learn how to do this because next I have to do this. So kids really are, they are agents in their own learning. They are active participants in their own community." The Rocky Hill district was in the process of finding ways to ensure district initiatives were impacting student achievement.

While district student achievement accountability was still being developed, teachers reported they were seeing changes to student achievement due to the professional development on Expeditionary Learning. Teacher A, a non-classroom teacher, made an effort to connect his learning to practice by joining a teaching team and sitting in on morning meetings in that classroom. He also took turns with the team of teachers to share the leadership role for meetings on a rotational basis. He felt this arrangement allowed him to build relationships with more students and use those relationships to help support the students he serviced. He also began implementing learning targets into his instructional practice. He noticed an impact, stating, “So this year having the learning targets up I feel like my students now feel that they know where they are in the process of accomplishing that learning target because it is on the board every day, we check every day, they give me feedback through exit tickets or through just random check-ins.” Teacher D stated that she learned how to explicitly identify short term and long term learning targets for a project and to write them in a rubric form that could be shared with students. This enabled the students to see the grading criteria and work toward the grade they wanted. She said, “I really found assessing, correcting the work that much easier. I felt before I would have this scale like between one and five and when you get a five or a four or three I would have to write what you are missing, where with the rubric you are just kind of circling okay it is pretty clear.” When speaking about student achievement, Teacher E stated, “I am going back to the whole child and they are not a test score and they are excited about learning and they come to school and read on their own about topics and have that curiosity and are excited about learning.” These teachers used observations of student behavior and assessment results to determine effectiveness of the professional learning they were implementing into their practice.

The District Advancement Office conducted a major fundraising drive and raised \$500,000 which was matched by an anonymous donor. These funds supported authentic learning throughout the district. At the elementary level, the fund paid the contract with EL Education® plus the associated travel and substitute costs for the teachers to do site visits. This funding was slotted to last for three years and after that it would be the responsibility of the schools to figure out how to include the costs into their operating budgets. In addition, the Advancement Office was also building partnerships with local businesses and a local university to have their employees come into the schools and share knowledge and work with students on projects. This effort is an attempt to connect more authentic learning between the schools and community.

The Rocky Hill Administrator stated that at Rocky Hill there had been a belief that “the teachers know the students, the school, the curriculum and know what is best to move the school forward.” Expeditionary Learning is not a one size fits all program, so the Rocky Hill Administrator said that the school needed to take on the hard work of going to the standards and looking at the local community and figuring out how to make Expeditionary Learning happen at Rocky Hill. He admitted there existed a tension between EL Education® and their goal of having schools that embrace Expeditionary Learning meet their credentials and the Rocky Hill staff who wanted to do Expeditionary Learning in a manner that reflected their own spirit, beliefs and traditions of their school. It was a process that required recognizing the end destination but involved working together as a school staff and with EL Education® to find the correct path to arrive there. The anxiety of the staff had risen as they had felt that EL Education® was telling them what to do rather than supporting their journey. An example was the amount of time spent during the school year on CREW® implementation. The teaching staff felt this was being

redundant because the school had already received national attention for their work on character education and they did not feel more training was needed. When staff challenged the need for this, they were told that it is part of the implementation process for year one to focus on CREW®. This led to frustration on the part of the staff because they felt their administrator was not communicating their needs to EL Education®. The Rocky Hill Administrator, because he was in his first year, admitted that he was still learning about his staff and the challenge for him arose in trying to correctly read or interpret their needs and share those with EL Education®. He admitted his role as a conduit between the two had led to some tension between him and the staff. Teacher motivation for implementation was greater at the start of the journey and he felt some of it had faded as the year went on. Teacher E disagreed, “Both of those things, character ed and Expeditionary Learning, have been grass roots so no one told us we were doing them. We said we want it and we received it so you approach it with a very different perspective when you say I’ve asked for this or this is something we think is important. So our building initiatives have all been teacher led and because of that, there has been near unanimous buy-in.” The implementation had put a strain on the school culture and the Rocky Hill Administrator’s ability to build a relationship with the staff. Teacher A felt the Rocky Hill Administrator was moving in a positive direction, stating, “I think the focus, the change that I have seen in support of our learning is not how does [Rocky Hill] turn into an Expeditionary Learning school but how does Expeditionary Learning fit in with [Rocky Hill]. I think in the beginning of the year it was more you know how do we turn into an Expeditionary Learning school and the real pushback from staff was we are already successful why do we need to turn ourselves into Expeditionary Learning, why can’t we just use some of the methods and mold them into what we do really well here.” He went on to say, “The calendar for becoming an Expeditionary Learning school was

shoved at us in late August and the staff was kind of this is a big calendar and a lot of things to achieve and here are some things that we are already doing well and we are testing really well ... in some of those other areas where that focus is going to go, is that going to take us away and kind of hinder us as a school and so the change happened and [the administrator] realized we are already really good at some things and so let's just make sure we are pulling some of the different resources from Expeditionary Learning and helping us grow." However, teacher E feels that the school had hit a wall that year. When speaking about the new administrator, she stated, "So part of that is knowledge, part of it is comfort, part of it is experience and we all know that it just feels like we have taken a huge step backwards while we have added a whole bunch of stuff that we are not able to, we like to think that the best decisions we make are everyone in the room, messy, sometimes heated, but there is always respect when we walk out we can say you know what I compromised. It was important to her, it is not so important to me, I am fine with that. But we were denied that this year. It did not work for our principal. He did not want a multitude of voices, he wanted to control the conversation. So then we got to the point where in controlling the conversation people stopped talking and you no longer hear their voice. When we are all rationale and can think about it there are many more factors, but there is one person for whom this is lying at their feet. Not because they have asked for it, not because it is right, but that is where we are today." Research has shown that the relationship between an administrator and the staff is important in the professional development design and implementation (Hoekstra & Korthagen, 2011; Youngs & King, 2002).

Commonalities Between Grassy Knoll, Sandy Shore and Rocky Hill

All three schools approached professional development in different ways. However, there were commonalities in their design. Teacher choice, opportunities for discourse, coaching, and

review of data were all featured in every professional development design. While the schools and districts were not currently requiring professional development to align to teacher evaluation, they were, however, exploring ways that the two could align. On the other hand, one of the main criticisms to district professional development was redundancy.

Choice was a component of each design. Grassy Hill afforded the most choice in offering a catalogue of professional development opportunities from which teachers could select according to their interests and needs. Sandy Shore offered choice through the summer learning opportunities. Although two days of attendance at professional development was required, the teachers could select from a variety of district offerings and even go outside the district offerings. At Rocky Hill, choice was reflected in the grass roots effort led by teachers to embrace Expeditionary Learning. Choice was also found in the teachers' opportunities to visit other sites, learn new strategies, and come back and teach the rest of the staff. In each case, teachers valued having a choice in their learning. Choice was often used as a means to differentiate, which research has shown maximizes individual capacities to grow and develop practice (Tomlinson, 2005).

Professional development opportunities for each district involved some form of discourse. Sandy Shore relied on discourse the most through its PLC and BLT models. A main tenant of the PLC structure is discourse around the three questions. In the BLT model, the team engaged in professional development and then designed a format for sharing with the remainder of the staff. This sharing is usually through the PLC teams. Grassy Knoll encouraged discourse in the design of the courses that were offered for teachers. Specialist teachers also talked about using the course structure as a means to meet with other specialists in their area across the district in order to discuss curriculum and instruction. Finally, Rocky Hill used discourse as

teachers planned and led the professional development sessions to share what they had learned from the training attended. The museum walk also allowed teachers to share their work and ask questions of one another. The opportunities for professional discourse were embedded within the professional development.

All three schools/districts used some form of coaching. At Rocky Hill, coaching was conducted by the school designer contracted through EL Education®. While the school designer planned some professional development, she primarily worked with teachers in the design of professional development sessions led by the teachers or worked with the teachers in implementing their learning into practice through the development of lessons, case studies or expeditions. At Sandy Shore, the math and reading coaches worked with grade levels or schools to video tape teachers and used these to discuss instructional practices. Lastly, at Grassy Knoll the district assigned an academic coach to each building. The coach's role was to support students as well as teachers. Interestingly, in each school the Administrator spoke about the role of the coach. Only one teacher at one school mentioned the coach as a means of professional learning.

Finally, all of the schools/districts relied on data to determine the effectiveness of professional development. At the school and district levels, all three used data to make decisions. Rocky Hill found connecting data regarding student learning to professional development to be challenging but the district was exploring ways to do that. Sandy Shore's needs assessment process heavily relied on data to make decisions about the topics for professional development. Grassy Knoll also used student achievement data to determine the types of courses to offer. At each site, some teachers were looking to data as well to make

decisions about the impact of their learning from professional development on student achievement.

The one negative that was mentioned across districts was redundancy. Teachers were frustrated when the district continued to address the same topics for professional development and did not build upon those topics. This frustration was vocalized by the teachers but it was unclear if the districts were aware of this frustration.

Chapter Five: Discussion, Implications and Future Research

In reference to professional development for teachers, Avalos states, "...teacher learning and development is a complex process that brings together a host of different elements and is marked by an equally important set of factors. But also, that at the centre of the process, teachers continue to be both the subjects and objects of learning and development." (2011, p. 17).

Research has found that duration, coherence, content connection, active learning and collective participation are all components of quality professional development (Desimone, et al, 2002; Garet, et al, 2001; Ingvarson, et al, 2005; Penuel, et al, 2007). This study focused on two questions: 1) In districts that have consistent and significant achievement gains for students, what are the occasions in which teachers learn? and 2) What organizational structures, cultures and supports shape teacher investment in professional learning? This study involved three schools in Wisconsin that are performing above the state achievement levels on state standardized tests and had the following population breakdowns: over 20% students of color, over 5% students with disabilities and over 20% students of low socio-economic status as defined by participation in the federal free and reduced lunch program. Teachers were asked about the contexts in which they choose to learn as well as the contexts for learning that were established by their respective school districts along with the administrative support for learning. School administrators were asked about the structures that were established for professional development including accountability. Both teachers and administrators were asked about the impact of professional development on student achievement.

Discussion and Implication of Findings

While definitions for professional development included teacher growth in their practice as an essential component, not all definitions included a connection that linked the purpose of

professional development to improving student achievement. Approximately one-fourth of the participants mentioned improving student achievement within their definition of professional development. At first this was concerning. However, upon deeper analysis, it was clear that improving student achievement and professional growth were both reasons for professional development. The purpose of professional development within two school districts was to increase student achievement and support teacher growth while professional development in the third district was viewed simply as a means of continual improvement. Districts used data to determine the impact of professional development on student achievement. For individual teacher learning, teachers chose areas for professional development based upon student needs or in response to characteristics of their learners. Half of the teachers used student achievement data to determine the impact of the changes to their practice based on learning obtained through professional development. The others used less formal measures to determine the impact of their learning on student achievement. If districts set student achievement as a high priority, it is important that administrators connect professional learning to student achievement outcomes. Sometimes these outcomes might be considered more abstract such as student feelings, motivation or even attendance and collected through student surveys or teacher observations. Other outcomes are more concrete and collected through assessments. Based on these findings, administrators do not always have a student achievement outcome in mind when planning professional development, and when they do, they typically have not identified the means to measure gains in student achievement.

Recommendation 1: Administrators should have a student achievement outcome in mind when planning professional development and along with an identified means for measuring student achievement. This should be shared with teachers at the beginning of professional

development sessions. Just as we share learning targets and assessment criteria with students, administrators should also share the expected outcomes and the measures for assessing those outcomes with staff. This would keep the purpose for the professional development at the forefront.

While administrators understand the importance of student achievement gains and use that knowledge to identify areas for professional learning opportunities, there are additional factors that administrators need to take into consideration. It is clear that teachers have individual preferences for professional development opportunities. It is also clear that a preferred learning method for one teacher may not be a preferred learning method for another. For example, some teachers find great value in book study while other teachers find book study to be of little value. This study identified several examples of teacher feedback regarding the professional development where teachers had a negative reaction or felt the professional development was not meaningful. It is important for teachers to have an opportunity to share feedback about professional development and to know that their feedback is being heard and respected.

Recommendation 2: Administrators should obtain feedback from teachers regarding professional development. This will enable the administrator to develop sessions that best meet the needs for that particular staff of teachers or to differentiate professional development methods to meet a variety of preferences. Since professional development sessions have costs in terms of both money and time, it is important that these sessions are meaningful and have the intended outcomes. However, in order for that feedback to be honest, there needs to be a level of trust between teachers and administrator. As in the case of Rocky Hill, when the relationship

between teachers and administrator is strained, it changes the whole culture of the building and impacts all interactions.

Discourse was clearly identified as a component of professional development that was valued by teachers. Research had previously identified collective participation as an important component of professional development that leads to change in practice. However, this study found cases in which teachers went to colleagues who were not participating in professional development along with them and still engaged in discourse with them in order to process and reflect upon their learning and apply it to practice. Teachers overwhelmingly valued the opportunity to talk with their colleagues, so much so that they viewed discourse as a stand-alone means for professional development as well as a component of more structured professional development. Discourse with colleagues was the main structure for teacher learning from both individually chosen professional development opportunities and district required professional development opportunities.

Recommendation 3: As administrators plan for professional development, it is important to allot time for discourse to occur. During the change process, teachers need opportunities for discourse before, during and after the implementation of new learning. Time was the roadblock to learning that was identified by teachers. One response from a teacher at Rocky Hill about prep time leads me to wonder if administrators need to revise how teachers view prep time or rename that time to professional time. A traditional view of prep time appears to be more isolated in nature rather than using that time to discuss teaching and learning with colleagues. Some form of PLC structure might be beneficial to reframe what is happening during that time and focus its use around analysis of student learning, application of professional development

and development of instructional lessons. Time for discourse needs to be established during professional development as well as during the teacher work day.

The other component of professional learning that was valued by teachers was hands-on learning. Active learning was also identified by research as a component of quality professional development. Active learning can include opportunities for discourse within the professional development structure but it also includes a deeper involvement by the teacher in the learning process. This could include the development of material that can be used with students in the classroom or the opportunity to participate in a learning experience or actually lead a lesson. Professional development opportunities that allow teachers to immerse themselves in the learning allow teachers to feel more confident in changing their own instructional practice to include the new learning.

Recommendation 4: Professional development should be designed with active learning experiences embedded and time for discourse throughout the process.

Research identifies coherence to role as professional development that is aligned to the teacher's position and is differentiated. This study found coherence to be broader than that. While the teachers valued professional development that was aligned to their content matter and differentiated, they also valued choice. One way to offer choice is to have a catalog of learning opportunities that teachers can choose from. Two of the districts in this study offered a variety of learning opportunities with a required number of hours that teachers needed to obtain. Teachers felt empowered by the opportunity to select professional development sessions that met their own identified professional learning needs. The third district also had a form of choice in that the teachers were allowed to identify an initiative that they felt would be beneficial to students and their learning. Since research identifies duration as an important part of effective

professional development, it is important for districts to be mindful of the one and done type sessions. Teachers felt that having choice increased their motivation for not only engaging in the professional development but also implementing the new learning into their practice.

Recommendation 5: Districts could address differentiation by offering different tiers of professional development opportunities; with a basic tier that introduces the instructional strategy to teachers and more advanced tiers that help the teacher refine their use of the strategy and more fully embed the strategy into practice. This would also enable more differentiation to occur. District controlled choice allows the district to establish the parameters for professional development and gives teachers choice within those parameters. The Sandy Shore Administrator stated that the district supports teachers in using new strategies for instruction with their students as long as the data supports the strategy and the strategy aligns with the district's initiatives. Districts who use the catalog choice method will need to monitor that teachers are actually making a connection between their learning, district initiatives and student achievement and not just "rubber stamping" teacher approval to attend professional development opportunities.

Differentiation continues to remain an area that needs to be addressed by school districts. Teachers want their learning to be meaningful. While two of the three districts had plans to address professional learning for new teachers, their means of addressing professional learning for more experienced teachers was limited. Choice was one means for differentiating. Differentiating within professional development sessions was encouraged, however none of the three districts had a specific structure in place for differentiating besides encouraging it as a practice by professional development presenters. The only complaint teachers had about professional development was redundancy. Teachers in all three districts spoke about repeated

professional development opportunities and how they negatively impacted their learning. Whether hearing the same speaker or attending professional development topics that are recurring, teachers want their voice to be heard so the professional development does not “waste their time” and has a meaningful connection to their instructional practice.

Recommendation 6: Administrators need to do more to differentiate in order to avoid redundancy. It will be key for administrators to know the needs of individual staff members so that professional development can be aligned to the needs of staff members. This would eliminate the one size fits all professional development opportunities except for introducing new initiatives. All other professional development needs to meet teachers where they are, not continually review where they have been.

The other need for differentiation is for the population of teachers known as specialists. Specialists at the elementary level are mainly art, music and physical education teachers. While these teachers appreciated knowing about the academic instructional strategies and materials, they had a hard time connecting the more academic instruction specific information to their instructional practices. Specialist teachers also expressed the least amount of support from their colleagues, especially colleagues who are academic based. Since there is usually only one person in each specialist area at the elementary level, these teachers often felt disconnected from their colleagues who teach the same subjects. These teachers really valued the opportunities to discourse with teachers in the same subject area. This is truly an example of the need for equity. Equity is not treating everyone the same, it is about everyone getting what they need.

Recommendation 7: Administrators need to make adjustments so that specialists do not need to attend a professional development session just because everyone else is attending. Rather specialists need to have an alternative professional development opportunity that more

closely aligns with their subject area or provide them the opportunity to meet with their subject area colleagues.

While teachers felt supported by administration in their individual and district professional development, it is important to address the relationship between teachers and administrators. At a time when education in Wisconsin is facing a lot of political scrutiny and budgets are tight, districts are limited in their ability to support professional development of teachers. There are fewer districts that have a steps and lanes salary structure which rewards teachers for continuing to take university credits to increase their knowledge of instructional practice. Credit reimbursement from districts appears to be disappearing. In addition, districts budgets face challenges for the costs of sending teachers to conferences, bringing in presenters or even the costs of in-house professional development. The role of a building administrator has changed from a manager to an instructional leader. It is important that the administrator has a level of trust and a positive relationship with teachers. While teachers felt supported by administration, that relationship can impact the culture of a building. As budgets become tighter and pressures for student achievement increase, it will be important for schools and districts to make sure their professional development efforts are having an impact on student achievement. While the districts have not formalized any connection with professional development and Educator Effectiveness evaluations, districts will want to establish accountability measures. As in the case of Rocky Hill, Boards of Education may also begin to start requesting data that supports high student achievement from initiatives. Without a positive relationship between administration and teachers, the school climate could be negatively impacted by increased accountability.

Just as we provide feedback for students regarding their learning, it is also important for administrators to provide feedback to teachers as they implement new learning from professional development. Once again, the relationship between the administrator and teacher will be key to the feedback process. Teachers want to be respected by their administrator. They also want to be able to respect their administrator. When the relationship is tense, it takes the focus off the work being accomplished and places in on individuals. This was evident at Rocky Hill. On the other hand, when a relationship is positive, teachers seek out the feedback of their administrator and are more accepting of recommendations. This was evident at Sandy Shore and Grassy Knoll.

Recommendation 8: Positive administrator and teacher relationships need to be cultivated in order for change from professional development that leads to growth in student achievement to occur. Developing trust will be key to building this relationship.

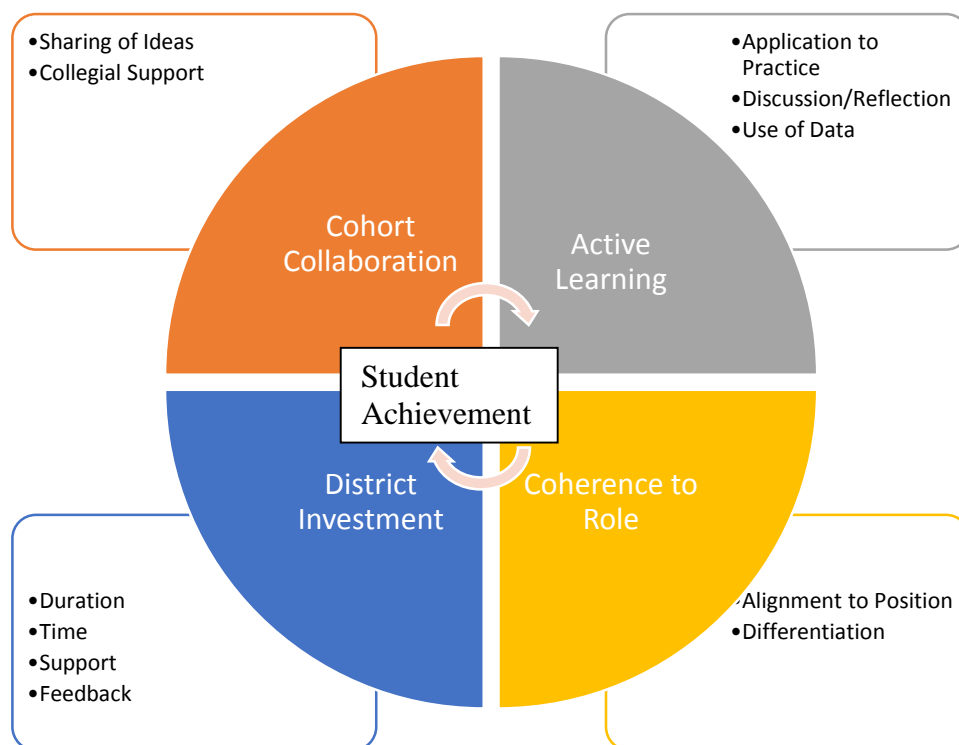
One of the most distressing findings from this study was the view of the role of learning coaches in professional development. It was not the intent of the study to focus on coaching as a means of professional development. However, since the findings show all three districts used some form of coaching and the role of the coach in professional learning was only mentioned by one teacher it is important to discuss that finding. All three administrators had clear definitions for the role of the coach. Whether the coach was someone from within the district, such as from Grassy Knoll, or from outside the district, such as Sandy Shore or Rocky Hill, the district is paying for these individuals to support the instructional practice of teachers. Yet teachers do not identify coaching as a means of professional development. The one teacher who did identify coaching as part of professional development was frustrated by the role because she felt the coach had too many responsibilities and did not really have time to support her in the way she

identified. The word coach first entered into the English language in the 15th century and it refers to anything that carries things from one place or point to another. Therefore, a coach in the framework of professional development would carry teachers from one place in their practice to another, ideally through modeling, practice, feedback, support, persistence and observation (Hargreaves & Skelton, 2012). Coaches are often positioned between administrators and teachers, at the center of a power struggle between both groups. How they represent themselves impacts this power struggle. Hargreaves and Skelton found, “The challenges of coaching and mentoring are not only how to connect and integrate systems of support, but also how to embed them in a pervasive culture of professional collaboration. Without this embedding, the association of coaching with deficiency will prompt those who are being supported to view their mentors and tormentors, and detach themselves from coaching relationships as quickly as they can.” (2010, p. 131). It is not enough for districts to identify the role of the coach, they must also ensure that the coach has the time and access to work with teachers in ways that develop the teacher’s practice.

Recommendation 9: Administrators should review research on the impact of coaching and coaching practices before establishing a structure for coaching. Coaches should also be knowledgeable about research. Hargreaves and Skelton (2012) encourage the development of collaborative cultures. Collaborative cultures are spontaneous, voluntary, development-oriented, pervasive across time and space and unpredictable. They state, “Collaborative cultures may be administratively supported and facilitated by helpful scheduling arrangements but ultimately they are sustained by the teaching communities’ belief in the value of working together for a common cause.” (p. 131). It is within this collaborative culture that coaching becomes most impactful.

The Model for Analyzing Professional Development

The model for analyzing professional development for this study was developed based on the findings from research regarding effective professional development design. This model is shown in Figure 2. The model placed student achievement at the center. The findings from this Figure 2



study support student achievement at the center of professional development. While only four participants included student achievement within their definition of professional development, teachers and administrators made professional development decisions based upon the learning needs of students and all but two used some form of data to measure the impact of professional learning upon student achievement.

Cohort collaboration was also evident within the research findings from this study. In the model, cohort collaboration involved sharing ideas and collegial support. According to the

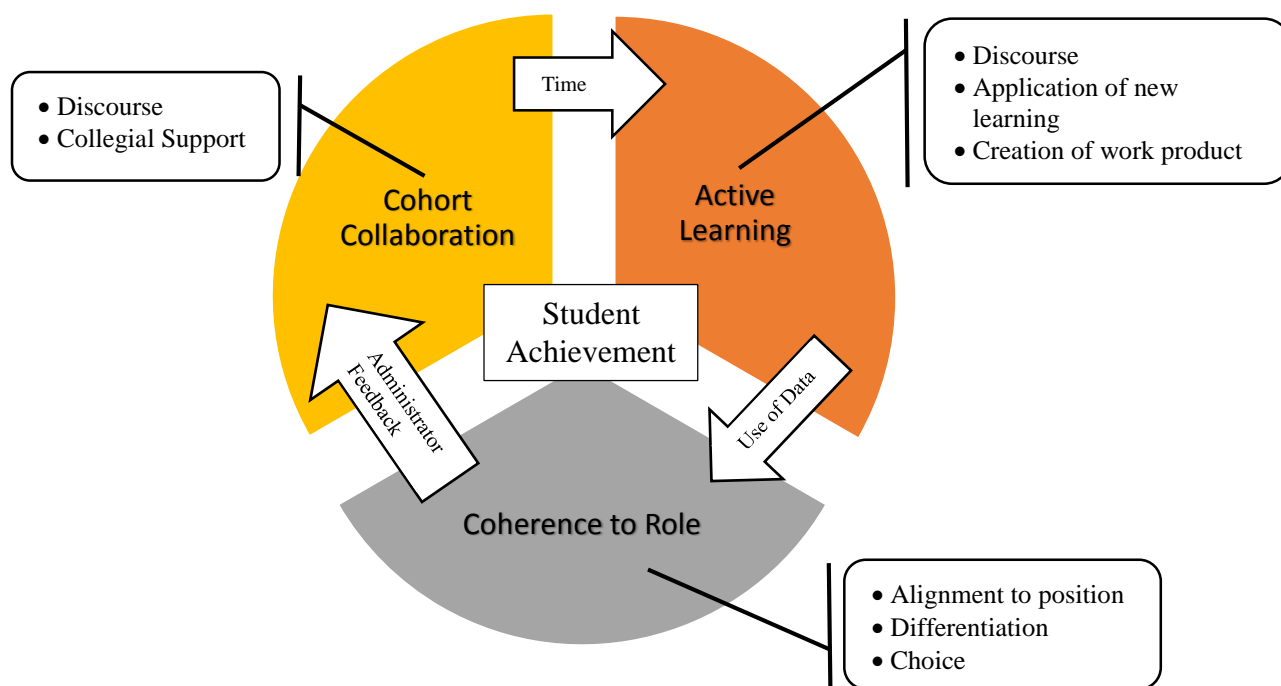
findings of this study, teachers went beyond a sharing of ideas. They engaged in discourse that included sharing ideas, giving feedback, questioning, refining practice and reflection. Teachers willingly engaged in cohort collaboration within a structured professional development and on their own in order to further develop their instructional practice.

The second component of effective professional development in the model was active learning. Teachers referred to active learning as hands-on learning. However, active learning encompasses the level of engagement teachers valued within professional learning. Teachers valued professional development that made them active participants in the learning by actually trying new strategies or instructional methods, developing materials for use in the classroom or engaging in discourse with colleagues to deepen understanding.

Coherence to role was the third component of professional development. Teachers want the learning to be meaningful for their practice. This is definitely an area that impacts specialist teachers at the elementary level. Being able to apply learning to their practice is motivational for teachers. Redundancy of professional development is the biggest complaint teachers expressed about professional development. Coherence includes differentiation of professional development to meet the various needs of teachers and the various experience levels. With any change to instructional practice, some participants embrace change more quickly and move their practice along to a different levels. It is important for professional development to meet the needs of individuals at different places along the change journey. In addition, teachers new to a school or district or even new to education need different professional development than more experienced teachers. One way to differentiate is to offer teacher choice. Teachers expressed more motivation toward changing their practice when they were offered some choice, or control, over their learning.

The fourth component of the model was district investment. However, based on the findings from this study, including district investment as a stand-alone part of the model does not account for all the professional development that teachers choose to do on their own and the changes they make to their practice based on that learning. Rather, district investment occurs within the other components of professional development. The new model for analyzing professional development is shown in Figure 3. In this model, student learning remains at the center and cohort collaboration, active learning and coherence to role are the three components of professional development that impact student achievement. Cohort collaboration includes discourse and collegial support; active learning includes discourse, application of new learning and creation of work product; and coherence to role includes alignment to position, differentiation and choice. Circulating all three areas are time, administrative feedback and use of data. There needs to be an investment of time on behalf of the teachers and the district in order for the change to practice to occur but also for professional development to take place. The

Figure 3



use of data is important to make sure professional development is impacting student achievement. This data can come in various forms. Finally, administrative feedback needs to occur so that teachers know they are moving in the correct direction and for accountability. This model aligns with the research on the components of professional development, however, as stated in the findings, professional development on its own did not equate to teacher learning and a change in professional practice. In order for meaningful learning to occur, administrators must provide teachers with opportunities to construct knowledge and apply the knowledge to practice. This application of knowledge occurred through the use of communities of practice, when teachers could actively engage with each other and support one another in changing practice. It is where professional development and teacher learning intersect that is most impactful on professional practice.

Future Research

This study focused on professional development of teachers in three Wisconsin elementary schools. One component of the research was the role of administrators in supporting the professional learning of teachers. As the role of administrator has become one of instructional leader, it is important for administrators to be knowledgeable in professional development methods and have an understanding of components of effective professional development.

During the interview process, two teachers spoke about the impact of National Board Certification on their practice. Both referred to the process as a method of professional development for their own practice. One of the teachers commented about the reflective nature of the process and how that gave her new insights into her instructional practice. In addition, the Wisconsin licensure renewal process of creating a Professional Development Plan, also focuses

reflection of practice. Future research in both of these areas would be valuable in determining their impact on professional practice and how administrators could replicate those features in order to support teacher learning on a broader scale in their schools.

Newly hired or newly graduated teachers have different professional development needs in order to become acclimated to school or district initiatives. Research that identifies the learning needs of new teachers would provide valuable insights to administrators in supporting new teachers and ensuring their instruction has the greatest impact on student achievement.

While learning coaches was used by all three schools in this study, teachers did not associate the role of the learning coach with their own professional development. In each case the administrator could outline the role the learning coach was occupying within the school but that did not relay back to teachers. Additional research on how teachers view learning coaches and how learning coaches impact their instructional practice would be valuable for administrators.

This study revealed concerns about how teachers were introduced to new materials through curriculum adoptions. Districts spend large amounts of money on textbook adoptions. Teachers expressed a desire to be able to use those materials effectively and wanted professional development on those materials. However, district professional development varied from non-existent to an overview of the components. Research that focuses on the professional development around materials adoption would inform administrators about the methods and structures that help teachers become proficient in the use of the materials and understand their connection with the content standards that drive instruction.

Finally, the goal for any administrator should be for a culture of learning to exist even when that administrator's time at a school ends. Research should focus on building a culture of

learning that is owned by the individual and staff so that it is sustainable after administrative change.

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Appendix A

Teacher Interview Protocol:

1. How long have you been teaching? What subjects/grades have you taught? How long have you taught in this school?
2. Describe how you keep current in your practice.
3. What areas are or have been a focus for your independent learning? Why did you decide to focus on those areas? What types of activities have you engaged in and how have those activities been structured? What types of activities did you value and feel impacted your growth the most? Why? What types of activities did you feel had little value and why?
4. How has your district/school administration support that learning? What specific things has administration done to help you in your learning? How has administration supported the use of the new learning? Has administration hindered your learning? In what ways?
5. How have your colleagues supported your learning?
6. Have you experienced any roadblocks to your professional learning from outside influences, and if so, what type?
7. How has this learning impacted student achievement and how do you know?
8. What areas are or have been a focus for your district or school learning? How have those professional learning opportunities been structured? What types of activities did you value and feel impacted your growth the most? Why? What types of activities did you feel had little value and why?
9. How has that learning impacted your instructional practice? How has that learning impacted student achievement and how do you know?
10. How has your district/school administration support that learning? What specific things has administration done to help you in your learning? How has administration supported the use of the new learning? Has administration hindered your learning? In what ways?
11. Think about a change you have made in your professional practice. What was the change? Why did you change? How did you go about changing your practice?
12. How would you define professional development?

Appendix B

Principal/Curriculum Director Interview Protocol:

1. How long have you been an educator? How long have you been an administrator in your current position? How long have you been responsible for planning professional development?
2. How do you define professional development?
3. Is professional development a primary strategy for school improvement? Is it a strength of the district? How do you know?
4. What is the purpose of professional development in your school/district?
5. How do you determine what types of professional development opportunities to provide?
6. Describe the types of professional development opportunities that occur at this school/district? Who participates? Is there any criteria for designing professional development? How are they structured? What strategies are used to deliver PD?
7. How does the district/school account for individual teacher differences when planning professional development? How do you tailor for individual difference during the course of the professional development session(s)?
8. How are teachers held accountable for their learning at professional development sessions? What type of feedback do you offer to teachers on their implementation of new learning?
9. How do you evaluate the impact of professional development on student learning? What professional development has proven to have an impact? How have you proceeded since then? What professional development has not? What did you do?
10. How is the school/district organized to support professional learning?
11. Are there unstructured or non-district planned opportunities for professional learning? What are those? How are they supported?
12. How does the school/district support individual teacher needs?
13. What are the positive outcomes of professional learning? How has professional learning impacting teacher motivation? What are the negative outcomes of teacher learning?

Appendix C

Participant Years of Experience

Teachers:

Years of Experience	Number of Teachers
0-4 Years	1
5-9 Years	4
10-15 Years	0
16-20 Years	2
21-30 Years	2
Over 30 Years	2

Years At Current Site	Number of Teachers
0-4 Years	3
5-9 Years	3
10-15 Years	2
16-20 Years	1
21-30 Years	2
Over 30 Years	0


Administrators:

Years in Education	Years as an Administrator	Years in Current Position
30	1	1
24	10	6
16	5	1

Appendix D


Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction School Report Card Sample and Information

PRELIMINARY - SECURE REPORT - NOT FOR PUBLIC RELEASE



Sample Elementary
Sample District | Public - All Students
School Report Card | 2015-16 | Summary

Overall Score



63.4

☆☆☆☆☆

Meets Expectations

Overall Accountability Ratings	Score
Significantly Exceeds Expectations	83-100 ★★★★★
Exceeds Expectations	73-82.9 ★★★★★☆
Meets Expectations	63-72.9 ★★★★★☆
Meets Few Expectations	53-62.9 ★★★☆☆
Fails to Meet Expectations	0-52.9 ★☆☆☆☆

Priority Areas	School Max Score	State Max Score
Student Achievement	57.8/100	69.9/100
English Language Arts (ELA) Achievement	28.3/50	34.0/50
Mathematics Achievement	29.5/50	35.9/50
Student Growth	54.6/100	66.0/100
English Language Arts (ELA) Growth	31.1/50	33.0/50
Mathematics Growth	23.5/50	33.0/50
Closing Gaps	56.5/100	62.4/100
English Language Arts (ELA) Achievement Gaps	29.5/50	32.6/50
Mathematics Achievement Gaps	27.0/50	29.8/50
Graduation Rate Gaps	NA/NA	NA/NA
On-Track and Postsecondary Readiness	85.3/100	88.6/100
Graduation Rate	NA/NA	NA/NA
Attendance Rate	73.7/80	74.9/80
3rd Grade English Language Arts (ELA) Achievement	11.6/20	13.7/20
8th Grade Mathematics Achievement	NA/NA	NA/NA

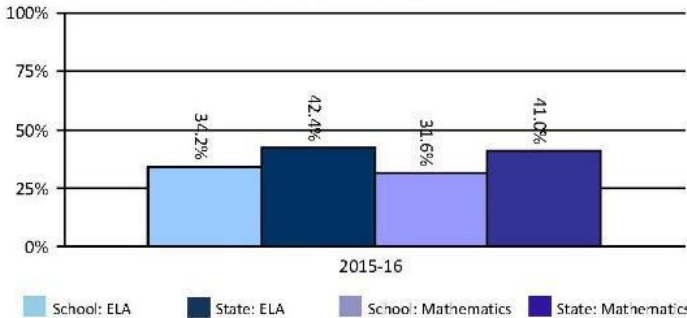
Student Engagement Indicators	Total Deductions: 0
Test Participation Lowest Group Rate (goal ≥95%)	Goal met: no deduction
Absenteeism Rate (goal <13%)	Goal met: no deduction
Dropout Rate (goal <6%)	Goal met: no deduction

School Information

Grades	K4-5
School Type	Elementary School
Enrollment	408
Percent Open Enrollment	0.8%
Percent Choice Enrollment	Not Applicable
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>	
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0.0%
Asian	4.2%
Black or African American	17.0%
Hispanic/Latino	7.1%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0.6%
White	66.6%
Two or More Races	3.5%
<i>Student Groups</i>	
Students with Disabilities	8.1%
Economically Disadvantaged	42.9%
Limited English Proficient	13.2%

Wisconsin Student Assessment System Percent Proficient and Advanced
Includes Forward Exam (grades 3-8), ACT (grade 11) and Dynamic Learning Maps (grades 3-8 and 11).

State proficiency rate is for all tested grades: 3-8 and 11



School: ELA	State: ELA	School: Mathematics	State: Mathematics
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Notes: Overall Accountability Score is an average of Priority Area Scores, minus Student Engagement Indicator deductions. The average is weighted differently for schools that cannot be measured with all Priority Area Scores, to ensure that the Overall Accountability Score can be compared fairly for all schools. Accountability Ratings do not apply to Priority Area Scores. Details can be found at <http://dpi.wi.gov/accountability/report-cards>.

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction | dpi.wi.gov

Report cards for different types of schools or districts should not be directly compared.

Page 1

PUBLIC REPORT Each year a School Report Card is released publicly on the DPI website (<http://dpi.wi.gov/accountability/report-cards>). You can select any district or private school participating in the choice program in the state*, and view any school or district report card. Report cards for **2011-12**, **2012-13**, **2013-14** and **2015-16** are available online in both summary and detailed versions. Report cards were not produced for the 2014-15 school year as per state law.

OVERALL ACCOUNTABILITY SCORE AND RATINGS Each school receives an Overall Accountability Score from 0 to 100. This score is calculated by combining the weighted average of the Priority Area scores minus any Student Engagement Indicator deductions.

A weighted average of Priority Area scores is used—not simple averaging. Wisconsin schools are diverse in size, grade spans, and student populations—and not all schools have data in all four Priority Areas. To account for this and to ensure the scoring is fair to all school types, the average is weighted differently for schools that do not have all four Priority Areas.

The weighted average includes variable weighting between Student Achievement and Student Growth based on the proportion of economically disadvantaged (ECD) students. The higher the proportion of ECD students, the greater the weight assigned to Student Growth and the lesser to Student Achievement, and vice versa.

The Overall Accountability Score places a school in one of five rating categories ranging from Significantly Exceeds Expectations to Fails to Meet Expectations. A five star rating system is also provided. The 0-100 index is not “percent correct” so these scores are never the same as grades.

STATE SCORES The state scores are given for comparison purposes only. They do not factor into the accountability scores or ratings.

PRIORITY AREAS

- 1. Student Achievement:** students’ level of knowledge and skills attained compared against state academic standards in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics.
- 2. Student Growth:** how rapidly students are gaining knowledge and skills from year to year, focusing on the pace of improvement in students’ performance.
- 3. Closing Gaps:** how much the school or district is closing statewide achievement gaps between student groups (comparing low-income students, English learners, students with disabilities, and members of racial or ethnic groups with their peers).
- 4. On-Track and Postsecondary Readiness:** how successfully students are achieving educational milestones that predict later success.

SCHOOL INFORMATION Basic demographic data for the school is provided for context. The performance of student groups is reported throughout the detailed report card.

COLLEGE & CAREER READINESS BENCHMARKS

This chart provides supplemental information about student proficiency in relation to college and career readiness benchmarks on the most recent state assessments. These data do not factor into the accountability scores or ratings. The chart shows a school’s recent ELA and mathematics proficiency alongside statewide performance, allowing for comparisons to state averages.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT INDICATORS Targets for student engagement are set. Schools and districts receive a deduction for each Student Engagement Indicator not met. These deductions are subtracted from the Priority Areas’ weighted average, and are reflected in the Overall Accountability Score.

Appendix E

Informed Letters of Consent

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
Research Participant Information and Consent Form

Title of the Study: Professional Learning in High Achieving Elementary Schools

Principal Investigator: Carolyn Kelley (phone: 608-263-5733) (email: kelley@education.wisc.edu)

Student Researcher: Michelle Weisrock (email weisrockm@gmail.com)

DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH

You are invited to participate in a research study about professional learning.

You have been asked to participate because you are a professional educator who works at one of the selected sites.

The purpose of the research is identify professional learning opportunities that teachers and administrators feel impact student achievement and to identify supports for or barriers to that learning.

You will be interviewed at a location of your choosing.

With your permission, the interview will be recorded to facilitate analysis. The recording will be destroyed following the completion of the research.

WHAT WILL MY PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?

If you decide to participate in this research you will be asked to participate in one interview.

Your participation will last approximately 1 hour for the interview.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO ME?

We do not anticipate any risks to you from participation in this study.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO ME?

We do not expect any direct benefits to you from participation in this study.

HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?

While there will be publications as a result of this study, your name will not be used. Only group characteristics will be published.

If you participate in this study, we would like to be able to quote you directly without using your name. If you agree to allow us to quote you in publications, please initial the statement at the bottom of this form.

WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

You may ask any questions about the research at any time. If you have questions about the research after the interview you should contact the Principal Investigator Carolyn Kelley at 608-263-5733. You may also contact the student researcher, Michelle Weisrock at weisrockm@gmail.com.

If you are not satisfied with response of research team, have more questions, or want to talk with someone about your rights as a research participant, you should contact the Education and Social/Behavioral Science IRB Office at 608-263-2320.

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you decide not to participate or to withdraw from the study it will have no effect on any services or treatment you are currently receiving.

Your signature indicates that you have read this consent form, had an opportunity to ask any questions about your participation in this research and voluntarily consent to participate. You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Name of Participant (please print): _____

Signature

Date

_____ I give my permission to be quoted directly in publications without using my name.

