

HOW LEADERS DESIGN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR STAFF IN A HIGH  
POVERTY AREA WITH HIGH LITERACY ACHIEVEMENT

By

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## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to six important people. Ryan, Kyle, Tim, Charlie, and Michael -- for the many evenings and weekends that took me away from all of you. To my editor and partner -- Steve. Thank you for being alongside me.

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# How Leaders Design Professional Learning for Staff in a High Poverty Area with High Literacy

## Achievement

Heather K. Sveom

### Abstract

Instructional leaders such as curriculum directors, principals, and teacher leaders are often given the charge of designing, delivering and supporting professional development for their teaching staff. While there is a vast body of information related to professional development and models educators can follow to improve the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and practices of teachers with the goal of ultimately positively impacting student achievement, leaders are left to decipher how to apply these models to their context. Many of the studies in the literature do not present the story behind how the staff developers decided what to do, why they made those decisions, and where they focused their energy and time. While practitioners can examine the research to inform their decisions, what is lacking is individuals sharing in their voice how they constructed professional learning opportunities for their staff. This study is a multi-site case study of two of schools in the same district. Primary sources of data include interviews of teacher leaders and district leaders and secondary data sources were online documents and artifacts provided by the participants. This study adds to the field by providing insight into how leaders design professional learning for staff in the area of literacy as evidenced by high achievement.

## **Chapter I: Introduction**

### **Introduction to the Study**

Professional development in K-12 education is widely considered to be essential to increasing the skills, practices, dispositions, and knowledge of teachers so as to positively impact student learning. Several existing professional development models examine the role of professional development and its impact on student achievement and take into account a teacher's knowledge, instructional practices, rigorous curriculum focused on standards, and some form of accountability. (Cohen & Hill, 2000; Fishman, Marx, Best, & Tal, 2003; Garet et al., 2001; Guskey & Sparks, 2004; Kennedy, 1998; Loucks-Horsley & Matsumoto, 1999).

Working under the premise that professional development indeed positively impacts student learning, practitioners often look to the research to guide their decisions. Researchers have developed models of professional development to capture the essence of highly effective professional development. In 2003, Guskey analyzed the then most well known and accepted professional development models, thirteen in all. He found that no one method for research was used by all the studies which developed professional development models. The models had some similarities but also differences -- both in the how the research was conducted and in what researchers found to be essential elements. On the one hand, Birman, Desimone, Porter, and Garet (2000) and Wenglinsky (2002) both found professional development traits derived from empirical means. On the other hand, different researchers relied on synthesis from empirical data (Kennedy, 1989) or on syntheses from empirical data and case studies (Hawley & Valli, 1996;

Loucks-Horsley, Stiles, & Hewson, 1996). The Educational Research Service (1998) used literature reviews as their method to develop their list of professional development elements.

An examination of the traits amongst the models shows that although many have several in common, no single trait was found across the thirteen lists. The five most common traits are the following:

- Deepening content and pedagogic knowledge – Present in 11 of the lists (Corcoran, 1995; American Federation of Teachers, 1996; Loucks-Horsely et.al., 1996; U.S. Department of Education, 1997; Educational Research Service, 1998; Kennedy, 1998; Birman et.al., 2000; Kent & Lingman, 2000; National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching, 2000; Wenglinsky, 2002; National Staff Development Council, 2001).
- Time and resources – Present in 10 of the lists (Corcoran, 1995; American Federation of Teachers, 1996; U.S. Department of Education, 1997; Educational Research Service, 1998; Kennedy, 1998; Birman et.al., 2000; Kent & Lingman, 2000; Terzian, 2000; Wenglinsky, 2002; National Staff Development Council, 2001).
- Collaboration and collegial relationships – Present in 9 of the lists (Corcoran, 1995; Hawley & Valli, 1996; Loucks et. al, 1996; U.S. Department of Education, 1997; Birman et.al., 2000; Kent & Lingman, 2000; National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching, 2000; Terzian, 2000; National Staff Development Council, 2001).

- Evaluation procedures – Present in 9 of the lists (American Federation of Teachers, 1996; Hawley & Valli, 1996; Loucks et. al, 1996; U.S. Department of Education, 1997; Educational Research Service, 1998; Kent & Lingman, 2000; National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching, 2000; Terzian, 2000; National Staff Development Council, 2001).
- Aligned with reform initiatives – Present in 8 of the lists (Hawley & Valli, 1996; Loucks et. al, 1996; U.S. Department of Education, 1997; Educational Research Service, 1998; Birman et.al., 2000; Kent & Lingman, 2000; National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching, 2000; National Staff Development Council, 2001).

Yoon, Duncan, Weh-Yu Lee, Scarloss, and Shapley (2007), in research on how professional development impacts student achievement reviewed empirical studies that met the What Works Clearinghouse standard. Nine studies, of a pool of 1,300 met the standard and are discussed more in-depth in the literature review. The following four studies were specifically in the area of English Language Arts:

- The relationship between explicit verbal explanations during reading skill instruction and student awareness and achievement (Duffy, Roehler, Meloth, Vavrus, Book, Putnam and Wesselman, 1986).
- Beginning literacy: Links among teacher knowledge, teacher practice, and student learning (McCutchen, Abbott, Green, Beretvas, Cox, Potter, Quiroga, Gray, 2002).

- Putting books in the classroom seems necessary but not sufficient (McGill-Franzen, Allington, Yokoi, and Brooks, 1999).
- The effect of staff development in the use of scoring rubrics and reflective questioning strategies on fourth-grade students' narrative writing performance (Tienken, 2003).

To broaden the empirical research perspective in highly effective professional development, an additional five studies that met the What Works Clearinghouse standard but were in the content areas of math or science are also included in the literature review. The five other studies are by Carpenter, Fennema, Peterson, Chiang, and Loef (1989), Cole (1992), Marek and Methven (1991), Saxe, Gearhart, and Nasir (2001), and Sloan (1993). A comparison of these criteria to the five most frequently listed professional development traits by Guskey's analysis, shows they are closely aligned to the effective professional development traits identified by other researchers.

In Guskey's analysis of professional development traits (2003), The National Staff Development Council (NSDC) was included as one of the models. Research has continued to evolve and Learning Forward, formerly known as NSDC has continued their work in identifying standards of highly effective professional development. In the summer of 2011, Learning Forward released their new standards of professional learning. These standards have formed the conceptual framework for this study and relevant research both qualitative and quantitative are described as part of the literature review. For a crosswalk between the 2001 and 2011 standards and operational definitions related to the conceptual framework see Appendix A.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Instructional leaders are responsible for the professional development of teaching staff. Leaders such as curriculum directors, principals, and literacy coaches are given the tasks of designing, delivering and supporting professional development. Many different models for professional development are available through research and at the disposal of these leaders. With an abundance of models, many of which have common elements, leaders are ultimately faced with the task of designing professional development opportunities for their staff that result in enhanced professional practice and gains in student achievement. In addition, they must do so within budget. It is estimated that public schools spend twenty billion dollars each year for professional development activities, and leaders must ensure that funds are well spent to meet their staffs' needs and positively impact student achievement (Zhou, 2008).

While leaders access this vast body of information and models related to professional development, they are left on their own to decipher how to apply these models to their context. These models range from having a few essential traits to consider in planning professional development to sometimes upward of 13 essential traits to consider in their planning. While helpful to have a model for those who plan professional development, the studies do not always present the story behind how or why the staff developers decided what to do, or where they focused their energy. The existing research often leaves out what leaders specifically focused on in designing professional development opportunities. While practitioners can examine the research to inform their decisions, what is lacking is the voices of individuals sharing what they found to be essential in their work.

**Question**

Given the abundance of models and research supporting models of professional development I have sought to hear in the voices of those responsible for planning professional development what they focused on. This interest has led me to the following question:

*In high poverty schools with high levels of literacy achievement, what steps are taken by district and elementary school leaders to provide effective professional development for teachers?*

Schools with high poverty were deliberately chosen because historically there has been an achievement gap when the data are disaggregated. Given this fact, I am assuming that something specifically must be happening to support teachers and student learning to overcome what is typically a difference in levels of achievement between groups of students.

In the next chapter, I review the research on professional development practices highlighting elements of highly effective professional development models. The reviewed literature forms the conceptual framework guiding this study.

## Chapter II: Review of the Literature

### Introduction

Professional development is a complex system with many components. The body of research on professional development includes both qualitative research and quantitative research. In this literature review, the focus is on professional development practices occurring at the elementary levels (Kindergarten through 6th grade). While the focus has been to include literature as it relates to findings in professional development in the area of literacy, a significant amount of the research is in other content areas such as math and science and is therefore included to give a broadened perspective in professional development best practices.

The literature review is organized through the seven standards for professional learning identified by Learning Forward. Recognizing that each of these seven standards springs from a vast and deep field of research, this review takes a macro view of professional development. This study does not delve deeply into any one standard. Instead, it seeks to identify, in a global perspective, the core elements leaders consider in designing, delivering, and supporting professional development to their staff.

Professional development can be defined in many ways, but this study adopts the following as defined by the NSDC, now known as Learning Forward (2011): “The term ‘professional development’ means a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving teachers’ and principals’ effectiveness in raising student achievement. Given this definition of professional development, creating professional development opportunities that are “comprehensive, sustained, and intensive” require leaders to make decisions in designing it for

their staff. For the full definition by Learning Forward as a proposed Amendment to Section 9101 (34) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act as reauthorized by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. See Appendix B.

Learning Forward recently shifted their lens from a focus on professional development to a focus on professional learning. Easton (2008) stated:

It is clearer today than ever that educators need to learn, and that's why professional learning has replaced professional development. Developing is not enough. Educators must be knowledgeable and wise. They must know enough in order to change. They must change in order to get different results. They must become learners, and they must be self-developing (Easton, 2008, p. 756).

In this study, the term professional learning and professional development will be used interchangeably.

Professional development is often thought of as linked to gains in student achievement, but proving this is not always easy (Borko, 2004; Loucks-Horsley & Matsumoto, 1999; Supovitz, 2001). Several professional development models look at the role of professional development through student achievement and take into account a teacher's knowledge, instructional practices, rigorous curriculum focused on standards, and some form of accountability. (Cohen & Hill, 2000; Fishman, Marx, Best, & Tal, 2003; Garet et al., 2001; Guskey & Sparks, 2004; Kennedy, 1998; Loucks-Horsley & Matsumoto, 1999). This literature review synthesizes the research as it relates professional development to improved student achievement by defining the components found in highly effective professional development. Professional development being a vast body of knowledge, this literature review is organized

according to the standards for professional learning as defined by Learning Forward. The seven standards are learning communities, leadership, resources, data, learning designs, implementation, and outcomes.

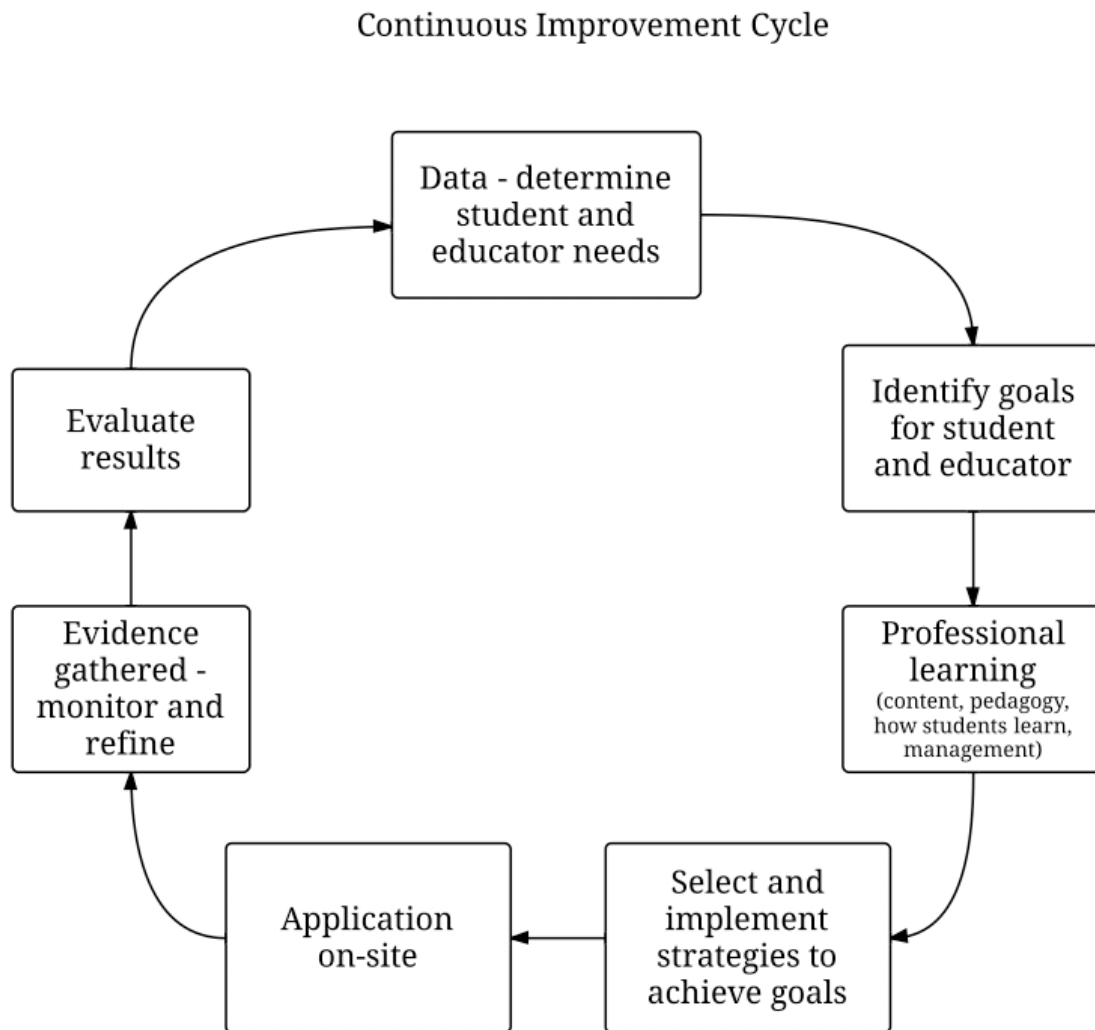
### **Learning Communities**

Learning Forward (2011) defines learning communities as “professional learning that . . . occurs within learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment” (p. 24). This definition assumes that learning communities are an institutionalized process, a form of professional learning where the individuals use the continuous improvement model, are collectively responsible for student learning, and support alignment of goals at all levels (individual, team, school, and school system).

In examining learning communities and their impact on student learning, one longitudinal quasi-experimental study conducted by Saunders, Goldenburg, and Gallimore (2009) found empirical data supporting the link between professional learning communities and positive results in student achievement. This study involved two stages. In the first stage, principals studied the principles of professional learning communities. In the second phase, grade level teams met two to three times per month between 45-50 minutes each time, and an instructional leader focused the meetings on curriculum, instruction, and the needs of their learners. The study found significant results (50.5 point gain on assessment compared to control group), especially for English Language Learners who had a 78 point gain compared to the control group.

The continuous improvement cycle is one essential piece of a professional learning community. The continuous improvement model is a cycle that follows this pattern:

Figure 1 -- Adapted from Learning Forward, (2011).



The continuous improvement model is a process members of a professional learning community follow during collaboration.

Collective responsibility, an essential piece of how learning communities pursue professional learning, is when *all* members are responsible for student learning. To achieve collective responsibility requires collaboration. Collaboration takes the form of working together, sharing ideas, strategies, and expertise (Guskey, 2003). Researchers have found that common traits of highly effective professional development is a collaborative and collegial work

environment (Corcoran, 1995; Hawley & Valli, 1996; Loucks-Horsley et al, 1996; U.S. Dept. of Education, 1997; Birman et. al., 2000, Kent & Lingman , 2000; National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching, 2000; Terzian, 2000; Wenglinsky, 2002; National Staff Development Council, 2011).

Collaboration is not limited to changing practice solely at the classroom level.

Collaboration has had effects at fostering change at the school level (Hord, 1997; Joyce & Calhoun, 1996; Louis, Marks & Kruse, 1996; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Newman & Wehlage, 1997; Perez et al, 2007). Collaboration by teams of teachers whether grade level, departmental level, or school level -- allows for a broad base of support and the development of common understanding. Teams working collectively, foster trust and a cycle of inquiry and reflection into one's own practice, and the ability to grapple with problems, take risks and examine one's practice in a safe environment (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Bryk, Camburn & Louis, 1999; Lieberman & Wood, 2002; Little, 1993).

Lastly, learning communities have a clear vision, with clear goals guiding their work. The professional learning is aligned so all members are collectively working toward the same vision. Their work is supported through policy, curriculum, and the resources of the school. Professional learning communities pursue their goals through various forms of collaboration. Some examples include peer observations of practice, analyzing data and student work, study groups, lesson study, coaching, and mentoring, This is not an exhaustive list, but rather a sampling of some of the learning some sites have chosen to pursue.

In summary, a learning community, with student learning as its focus, designs professional learning when members of the community assume collective responsibility for all students, engage in the continuous improvement cycle, and align their goals to avoid fragmentation.

## **Leadership**

The Learning Forward (2011) standard on leadership is “skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning” (p. 28). Leadership can, of course, be defined in many ways. One can fairly infer that in all the standards, leaders often have a direct influence. This review, however, will discuss leadership only as it relates the three core elements -- capacity, advocacy, and systems -- in providing effective professional learning environments.

In a review of research conducted by Leithwood et. al. (2004) and Waters et. al. (2003) they concluded that leadership had a significant effect on student learning and that leadership can be found throughout all levels of the school system. An organization’s leaders can be found at the system level (such as a director of curriculum), the school level (such as a principal), or the classroom level (such as a teacher or literacy coach).

The Learning Forward standard of leadership encompasses the leader’s role in building capacity. Bredeson (2005) defined capacity as “an organization’s ability to use its collective resources in ways that help it achieve its primary mission effectively while sustaining the organization over time” (p. 2). Bredeson (2005) also noted the crucial role leadership can play in professional learning when capacity building is “enhancing their knowledge, skills, and commitment to improving performance, as well as achieving goals more effectively” (p. 2).

Effective leaders recognize the importance of advocating and creating support systems for learning. “Distributed leadership” is an example of a system and structure many educational institutions are developing when creating professional learning systems. Many definitions are associated with distributed leadership, but this study uses the definition from the work of Bredeson and Kelley (2010). They describe distributed leadership as “The collaborative work of principals and teacher leaders that creates the conditions, structures, processes and individual capacities to influence instructional designs and practices that effect student learning.” This definition is appropriate here because it is closely aligned with Learning Forward’s definition of leadership, with a direct effect being student learning.

In summary, leadership is broader than an individual and encompasses the entire school system. Using a distributed leadership model, leaders work collaboratively to make decisions which will impact student learning. Working collaboratively, leaders take into account all standards described in this literature review.

## **Resources**

Resources is defined by Learning Forward (2011) as “professional learning that . . . requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning” (p. 32). Resource allocation requires developers of professional learning opportunities to prioritize the resources based on the needs of the staff and students’ data. The developers must also monitor how the resources are being used and coordinate the resources at the local and district level.

Resources can be described as human, fiscal, material, technology, and time. In an analysis conducted by Guskey (2002) of effective professional development models, eight models cited sufficient time and other resources as key elements (Corcoran, 1995; American Federation of

Teachers, 1996; U.S. Department of Education, 1997; Educational Research Service, 1998; Birman, Desimone, Porter, & Garet, 2000; Kent & Lingman, 2000; Terzian, 2000; National Staff Development Council, 2001).

Time has also been cited as a key factor in the nine studies in Yoon et. al. (2007) analyses.

Results specific to English Language Arts were the following:

- 10 hours over four months (Duffy et. al., 1986);
- Nearly 100 hours over 10 months (McCutchen et. al., 2002);
- Nearly 30 hours over six months (McGill-Franzen et.al., 1999);
- 14 hours over three and a half months (Tienken, 2003).

Financial resources can be a significant factor in professional development. Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act mandates that schools who meet criteria as low performing allocate 10% of their budget for professional development. In addition, Title II funds include over \$3 billion dollars allocated for professional development. Honegger (2007) estimated twenty billion dollars was spent annually to support professional development in 2004-05.

In summary, resources are people, fiscal means, materials, technology, and time. The focus within this standard is that designers of professional learning experiences prioritize resources based on the needs of the learners, and the designers monitor, and coordinate their use to positively impact student learning.

### **Data**

The data standard is defined by Learning Forward (2011) as “professional learning that . . . uses a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and

evaluate professional learning” (p. 36). Learning Forward describes the role of data as the following:

Data from multiple sources enrich decisions about professional learning that leads to increased results for every student. Multiple sources include both quantitative and qualitative data, such as common formative and summative assessments, performance assessments, observations, work samples, performance metrics, portfolios, and self-reports. The use of multiple sources of data offers a balanced and more comprehensive analysis of student, educator, and system performance than any single type or source of data can. However, data alone do little to inform decision making and increase effectiveness. (p. 61)

The importance in the use of data as part of an effective professional development is often cited. In a review of professional development models Guskey (2002) found several models that listed data as a necessary element. These models include the following: Hawley & Valli, 1996; Educational Research Service, 1998; Kent & Lingman, 2000; National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching, 2000; and the new standards developed by Learning Forward, 2011. Data is also recognized as one characteristic of the continuous improvement cycle and is often thought of as the starting point in the cycle. (Figure 1)

Data regarding teacher effectiveness is also a component of professional development. An Early Reading First (ERF) three year study, monitored teachers’ progress in relation to student learning. Using the Pearson and Gallagher model (1983) of gradual release, the literacy coaches followed an “I do, We do, You do” model of gradual release responsibility for instruction with the classroom teacher. This method allowed teachers to evolve and grow from

what teachers could do with support and scaffolding to, eventually, perform independently. The coach supported the teachers' learning by monitoring where teachers were at in their professional learning and then matching the "I do, We do, or You do" model. Ultimately, teachers reached the "you do" phase by the end of the professional coaching.

The data from this three year study is promising. The first year, showed no significant difference in student learning on measures of concepts about print, alphabet knowledge, and phonological awareness of rhyming. By the third year, however, data analysis revealed significant achievement differences between participants in the ERF classrooms and non-ERF classrooms (Griffith, Kimmel, & Biscoe, 2010).

In summary, data is a starting point in a continuous improvement cycle. Through data analysis, professional learning can be designed to meet teacher needs and at the end, to examine student outcomes for evidence of learning and professional development effectiveness.

### **Learning Designs**

Learning Forward defines learning designs as "professional learning that . . . integrates theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes." Learning designs includes the selection of the learning design and promoting active engagement amongst the participants (Learning Forward, 2011).

Many learning theories and models have been developed by psychologists and neuroscientists. This review of the literature focuses on the application, not the development, of learning theories. In 2011 Learning Forward identified many common features from research and theories on learning and how it occurs. The common features found in teacher practice resulting

in student learning are “active engagement, modeling, reflection, metacognition, application, feedback, ongoing support, formative and summative assessment that support change” (p. 40).

Where and how these features are applied can vary from site to site.

As staff developers design professional learning opportunities, they must decide who will be part of the learning experience. It could be individuals, teams, or the whole school. In addition, considerations such as face-to-face, online, or a mixed format must be decided. Lastly, consideration must be given as to whether the learning experience is during the work day, part of the work, or outside the work day.

Learning designs are based on what is known about adult learning and the context of the workplace. Creators of professional learning experiences develop learning experiences to develop the knowledge, skills, and practices of the staff. These conceptualizations of professional development fit within the learning design and provide a framework of how learning designs can be created in distinct ways. The learning design can take many forms, from being job-embedded to outside the workday. Bredeson (2003) has developed a model where professional development can take the forms “in” work, “at” work, and “outside” of work.

Professional development “in” work refers to professional development that is embedded during the work day and not separate. Professional development can be collaborative, individual, formal, or informal. The types of embedded development range from reading, reflecting, action research, teachers talking, team teaching, and coaching. Professional learning “at” work refers to opportunities such as workshops, meetings, and inservices occurring at work and when staff are not teaching or preparing to teach. Lastly, professional learning “outside” of work refers to

professional learning opportunities outside the work environment, such as conventions, institutes, and coursework (Bredeson, 2003).

One example of a job-embedded staff development model looked at early literacy skills. In a three year study on early literacy skills for prekindergarten at-risk students conducted by Griffith, Kimmel, and Biscoe (2010) they found that the researched-based model called the Griffith-Kimmel Optimal Learning Sector Model or Acceleration (OLS) was effective in increasing educator's effectiveness as evidenced by high levels of learning. The structure of the professional development consisted of teachers and aides receiving bi-weekly professional development during the first year. In addition, a mentor was available the first year. In years 2-3, teachers worked with a literacy coach and had their teaching scaffolded using the "I do, We do, You do" model of gradual release of responsibility (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983).

Yoon et.al. (2007) cited four studies focusing on English Language Arts. The learning design of each study was as follows:

- The study involved teaching teachers how to use strategies to deliver explicit instruction to low readers. The design of this professional learning was an initial training in November followed by five monthly sessions lasting two hours after school. Within the five sessions, the design was a four step model for the professional learning experience. Staff were provided the information, had it modeled, the participants analyzed and critiqued their own work, and lastly they were provided feedback (Duffy et. al., 1986);
- In the summer, the university research team hosted a two-week summer institute. During the school year three follow-up meetings were scheduled, and there were informal interactions and support at the classroom level (McCutchen et. al., 2002);

- To study the effects of adding classroom libraries in kindergarten classrooms and providing additional professional development to teachers, the researchers designed the program with training outside the workday. The study had a summer institute for three days, with seven additional two hour trainings after work during the fall (McGill-Franzen et. al., 1999).

Active engagement is another component of learning design. Learning Forward (2011) describes active engagement occurring “when learners interact during the learning process with the content and one another” (p. 42). Penuel et. al. (2007) confirmed the findings of the Eisenhower study which found active engagement to be a piece of highly effective professional development. Examples of “active learning processes include discussion and dialogue, writing, demonstrations, inquiry, reflection, metacognition, co-construction of knowledge, practice with feedback, coaching, modeling, and problem solving” (p.42). Garet et. al (2001) conducted a study as part of the Eisenhower Professional Development program, and they described features of highly effective professional development. One of the key features, which they call a core feature, necessary to professional learning is active learning.

In summary, learning designs include the selection of a learning model for the staff and the instructional leaders decide whether the professional development will be conducted “in” work, “at” work, or “after” work. Lastly, the developers decide the ways they can actively engage the participants to maximize the participants’ learning.

## **Implementation**

Learning Forward (2011) defines implementation as “professional learning that . . . applies research on change and sustains support for implementation of professional learning for

long-term change” (p. 44). Implementation also includes participants receiving constructive feedback and reflection opportunities (Learning Forward, 2011).

This literature review does not examine change research, but will focus on the application of it. Fullan (2007) is perhaps one of the most widely recognized researchers on change in the education field. In his latest work, he found that professional learning must be sustained over the career of the individuals. In *Professional Development in Education* (1995), Fullan describes continuous learning and the role we play as “an agent of comprehensive change. It is a learning habit that permeates everything we do. It is not enough to be exposed to new ideas. We have to know where new ideas fit, and we have to become skilled in them, not just agree with them” (p. 257).

Continuous learning requires ongoing professional learning experiences. The Early Reading First study is an example of how professional learning can be supported over time. Teachers participated for three years in the study, and the type of professional development changed over time. In the first year, teachers and aides worked bi-weekly with a master literacy specialist and a mentor supported in the classroom. In years two and three, a literacy coach supporting the professional learning of the educators in the classroom through modeling, co-teaching, and eventually the teacher leading the instruction (Griffith, Kimmel, & Biscoe, 2010). Implementation was supported through ongoing professional learning experiences and with experts in the form of literacy specialists and coaches.

Guskey and Yoon (2009) synthesized key findings from an analysis, *Reviewing the Evidence on How Teacher Professional Development Affects Student Achievement* (Yoon et. al. 2007), and support the findings that implementation to be effective must be allowed considerable

amount of time. Thirty hours or more were found to have a positive effect. In addition, follow-up was critical in sustaining change. Nearly all the studies included sustained follow-up professional learning after the initial professional development training.

Feedback is considered an essential element for implementation. Guskey (2002) cites many areas on which to gather feedback such as formative assessments, students' scores on tests, and students' feelings. Information gained from student learning allows teachers to see the effects of their instruction. Guskey (2002) states, "If the use of new practices is to be sustained and changes are to endure, the individuals involved need to receive regular feedback on the effects of their efforts" (p. 387).

In summary, when developers are planning professional development they are mindful of change research. The professional development is ongoing and sustained over time. Guskey (2002) notes that professional learning is a process, not an event. Another essential element is the participants receive feedback to monitor their own learning.

## **Outcomes**

Learning Forward (2011) defines outcomes as "professional learning that . . . aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards." (p. 48). Coherence is a core characteristic of the outcomes standard. Coherence is professional learning that is scaffolded and builds on previous learning (Learning Forward, 2011).

Educator performance standards refer to the knowledge, skills, practices, and dispositions of educators. Educator standards delineate what teachers need to know and be able to do to be effective. This includes deep understanding of content, pedagogy, assessment, how students learn, and students' development including social, emotional, and cognitive development.

Educator performance standards also include understanding many specifics of their work environment such as the cultural background of their students, socioeconomic influences, how to engage families and the community in student learning, and how to create an engaging learning environment.

Content, or the “what” of professional development, is the enhancement of teachers’ content and pedagogic knowledge. In an analysis of professional development models conducted by Guskey (2003), content is the attribute most often identified effective professional development models (Corcoran, 1995; American Federation of Teachers, 1996; Loucks-Horsely et.al., 1996; U.S. Department of Education, 1997; Educational Research Service, 1998; Kennedy, 1998; Birman et.al., 2000; Kent & Lingman, 2000; National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching, 2000; Wenglinsky, 2002; National Staff Development Council, 2001).

More specifically, Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) found the content was most effective when it focused on “concrete tasks of teaching, assessment, observation and reflection” (p. 598). When content was focused on abstract areas of teaching, professional development was found to be less effective.

A number of researchers have found that when student learning is the focus and professional development emphasizes understanding students’ conceptual understandings and the skills teachers expect students to know and be able to do, the professional development practice is effective (Blank, de las Alas & Smith, 2007; Carpenter et al, 1989; Cohen & Hill, 2001; Lieberman & Wood, 2002; Merek & Methven, 1991; Saxe, Gearhart, & Nasir, 2001; Wenglinsky, 2000).

Recently, on the national level, common standards have been created for all K-12 students in the areas of mathematics and English language arts. The Common Core Standards developed by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) have been adopted by the majority of states in the United States <http://www.corestandards.org/>. These standards identify grade-by-grade what it is we want all students to know and be able to do K-12. As districts move forward in developing a guaranteed and viable curriculum, this content knowledge will become the focus for standards based curriculum.

Learning Forward's definition of outcomes focuses on more than content in terms of student learning and teacher learning. In addition to the performance standards for teachers and goals for students described above, alignment of curriculum and instructional practices with policy effected student achievement. In a study by Cohen and Hill (2000) in the area of math education, the researchers found a positive effect when curriculum and classroom practices were aligned with state tests, and coupled with teachers having sufficient time to learn the instructional practices.

Several other studies have found a positive relationship between professional learning and having professional development being integrally involved in the school reform effort rather than an isolated event such as a one day workshop (Elmore & Burney, 1997; Garet et al, 2001; Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi & Gallagher, 2007; Supovitz, Mayer & Kahle, 2000). Research points to positive results in inquiry-based instructional practices when curriculum, assessment, standards, and professional development are created, and what teachers experience in professional development is what they are to implement in their classrooms. In a study

conducted through the National Science Foundation's Discovery science professional development in Ohio, teachers took part in a six-week content institute and then reconvened six times throughout the year to look at curriculum and assessments. Additionally, these teachers could request support and site visits by outside resources (Supovitz, Mayer & Kahl, 2000).

An example of professional learning being aligned with educator effectiveness and the curricular standards for students was a study done by Griffith, Kimmel, and Biscoe (2010). This study was with teachers of preschool students and the professional development was in the area of literacy and focused on student's skills of early language development, cognitive skills, and preschool skills. Teachers' learning experiences were designed to align directly with what it is they wanted the students to know.

In summary, outcomes is a broad standard focusing on the performance standards for educators, the curricular standards for students, and developing coherent professional learning opportunities for the participants. Coherence is achieved by scaffolding the learning of the participants of the professional learning.

### **Summary**

When developing professional learning experiences for staff to ultimately impact student learning, educators have many factors to consider as part of the planning, implementation, and evaluation. According to the research, these factors must be present, and there is an interrelationship amongst them.

This literature review focused on seven standards for professional learning developed by Learning Forward. The standards are; learning communities, leadership, resources, data, learning

designs, implementation, and outcomes. The descriptions for each of the standards are summarized below:

- *Learning communities* have collective responsibility, follow a continuous improvement cycle, and align their goals to avoid fragmentation.
- *Leadership* is developing capacity, advocating, and creating the systems necessary for effective professional development.
- *Resources* in professional development are prioritized, monitored, and coordinated.
- *Data* are used to plan, assess, and evaluate the professional development experiences.
- *Learning designs* use research about human learning to create professional learning that engages the staff and is conducted “in” work, “at” work, or “outside” of work.
- *Implementation* uses change theory to help guide the developers in creating ongoing, sustained professional learning experiences.
- *Outcomes* refers to the alignment of educator performance standards and the curriculum standards. Leaders ensure coherence through professional learning that builds on previous educator learning.

Research shows the inter-relationship amongst the seven standards and it creates the conditions necessary for highly effective professional development, resulting in professional learning experiences for the educators and high levels of student learning for the students.

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework guiding this study is based on the standards for professional learning developed by Learning Forward. This conceptual framework suggests that all seven standards must be present in a working reciprocal relationship. These seven standards working together yield highly effective professional development, which in turns enhances a teacher's practice and ultimately student learning.

Figure 2



### Chapter III: Research Design and Methodology

This chapter defines the research method used and describes how this type of research lends itself to better understanding the research question. Specifically, I address my orientation and how my professional experiences have led me to explore this research question with the focus on a multi-site case study. I also outline the process of participant selection, the procedures I followed in collecting data, the process of analyzing the data, ethical considerations, limitations to the study, and the significance of the study.

#### Research Design

To address my question, "*In high poverty schools with high levels of literacy achievement, what steps are taken by district and elementary school leaders to provide effective professional development for teachers?*" I employed qualitative methods. Denzin and Lincoln in Creswell (2007) define qualitative research as follows:

A situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including fieldnotes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of meanings people bring to them. (p. 36)

A qualitative approach was appropriate for this question, as it seeks to understand what school leaders are doing. The goal is to try to make sense by getting close to what is happening

through interviewing and conversing, of the situated professional development that leaders chose to provide to their teachers. The literature I reviewed includes both quantitative and qualitative research. In recent years, there has been a call for research that meets the gold standard in empirical evidence (Guskey & Yoon, 2009). Those studies, while reliable, do not always include the stories, contexts, and the non-quantifiable elements of an environment. I sought to understand the elements of planned professional development -- as it relates to *both* the quantitative research and qualitative research in the field of education -- to paint a richer, fuller picture of what is happening in these specific school environments.

**Paradigmatic orientation.** As a researcher, I bring to my work my assumptions, worldview, and theoretical lens (Creswell, 2007). In 2003, Creswell identified four worldviews: postpositivism; constructivism; advocacy/participant; and pragmatism. Miles and Huberman (1994) see many of these overlapping. Looking at these world views as a continuum, I describe my own view as near the middle with a constructivist/interpretivist worldview prevailing. Guba describes paradigm as “beliefs that guide actions” (Creswell, 2007 p.17). This study focused on understanding what was happening at these two sites and the social construction of knowledge and practices in teaching young students.

This topic was of particular interest to me because I have been in the field of education for 22 years and I have always had a desire to understand how to create spaces where students can learn at high levels. I have held the position of a teacher at the elementary level for 15 years and that of a district-leader (principal) at the elementary level for 7 years. I brought these perspectives of teacher and leader and the experiences from those years, to my current role as a researcher. Experiences in these positions have shaped my beliefs about education and

professional development, both as a teacher who received and participated in professional development and as a principal who planned, implemented, and oversaw professional development. I recognize that these perspectives and experiences influence me as a researcher. In doing this research, I aimed to rely on those interviewed and their views of what is occurring in these social situations (Creswell, 2007).

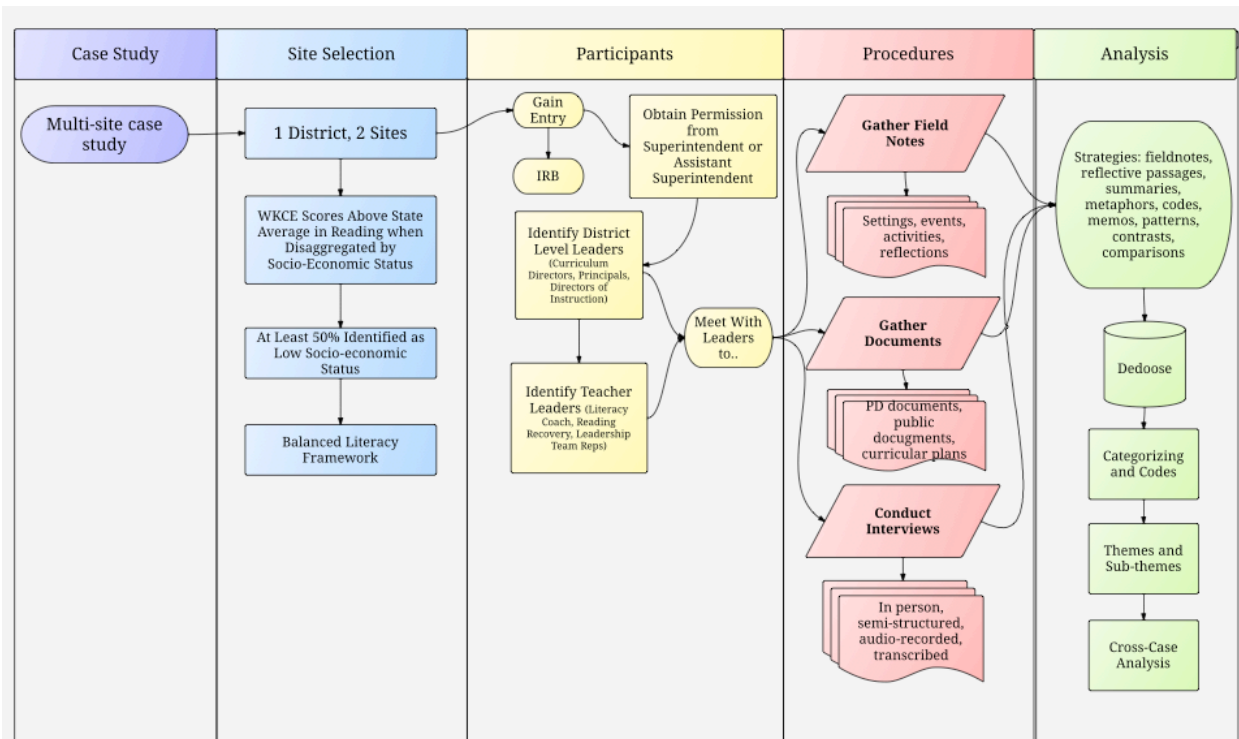
**Case study.** The design that assisted me in researching my question was the case study. Case study involves choosing a case or a bounded system and studying it in-depth and over time (Creswell 2003). This was chosen because of its “real-life context” (Yin, 2006). Although case studies involve a single site or multiple sites, I chose to conduct a multi-site case study so that I could do a cross-case theme analysis to see similarities and differences between school sites (Creswell, 2003). Studying two sites, assisted me in developing a better understanding regarding the question of this study. Specifically, I selected two sites that are confirmatory cases and are “presumed replications of the same phenomenon” (Yoon, 2006 p. 115). The information I gathered in these case studies was through interviews and secondarily, through documents -- online artifacts, documents I received from the participants, and reports shared with me by the participants or found online on the district website. Using these methods, I triangulated the data using an iterative process to discover themes and patterns.

Although findings cannot be generalized, choosing more than one site and using logic replication, allowed me to see the perspectives of various individuals and whether there were similarities (Creswell, 2007). I used the same process and procedures at both sites. I believe having two school sites where I interviewed the principal and teacher leaders, as well as

interviewing two district leaders, gave me the opportunity to develop a broad understanding of what is happening in relation to my question.

An overview of the process can be found below:

Figure 3



**Participants.** This multi-site case study looked at an urban school district consisting a total of about 7,000 students and specifically two schools within the district. Each of the two schools selected was considered a separate case to be studied. I chose the sites based on the assumption that a school with both a high percentage of students identified as economically disadvantaged has purposefully done something when those identified students score above average on the state assessment. The criteria used to select the sites are as follows:

- Based on Wisconsin Knowledge Concepts Examination – Criterion Referenced Test (WKCE-CRT), when the data were disaggregated by socio-economic indicators, students identified as economically disadvantaged at that site scored above the state average in reading for the 2011-2012 school year. Percentages of combined advanced and proficient at the site were compared against the state. The WKCE-CRT-CRT is the statewide assessment given to students in grades 3-8, and 10<sup>th</sup> grade.
- The percentage of students identified as low socio-economic status was at least 50%.
- The language arts curriculum was based on a constructivist framework, such as a balanced literacy framework.

**District screening.** To aid me in selecting the district, I began by going to the Department of Public Instruction website and going to their Wisconsin's Information for Successful Schools (WINSS) site (<http://data.dpi.state.wi.us/data/>). Knowing that I wanted to study two schools within the same district, I began my search by looking at larger urban school districts. The process I followed was to look at one school district, disaggregate the data by economic status to see the percentage of students who qualified as economically disadvantaged. If there were at least two elementary schools with 50% or more economically disadvantaged, I then looked at their data to see if they met the achievement criteria. I continued this process until I had a list of potential schools.

To decide on the district of interest for this study, I looked at the grades of the schools. For the district chosen, three schools met the criteria and two of the sites were K-3 schools, the other was grades 4-5. The early learning of reading was of particular interest to me as the early grades provide the foundation in reading, but I was also interested in the district administrator's recommendation of the two schools that he or she would suggest for further study.

Table 1

*Percentage of Students Identified at School Sites as Economically Disadvantaged*

School (Pseudonyms)	Grades at site	School Percentage of Students Identified as Economically Disadvantaged	State Percentage of Students Identified as Economically Disadvantaged
Niyoron Elementary	K-3	65.4%	44.5%
Binalo Elementary	K-3	76.8%	44.5%
Atis Elementary	4-5	67.4%	44.5%

All three schools met the criteria of at least 50% identified as economically disadvantaged.

The data below summarizes reading scores of economically disadvantaged of the three elementary schools compared to the state.

Table 2

*Reading Achievement on WKCE-CRT Fall 2011*

School (Pseudonyms)	Grade Tested	School % Proficient & Advanced Economically Disadvantaged	State % Proficient & Advanced Economically Disadvantaged
Niyoron Elementary	3rd	75%	68.2%
Binalo Elementary	3rd	72.5%	68.2%
Atis Elementary	4th	100%	70.5%
Atis Elementary	5th	91.7%	68.2%

All three school sites met the criteria for scoring above the state average in percentage of students scoring proficient and advanced in reading.

**Entry.** I made initial contact by phone with the Assistant Superintendent of Instruction and followed-up with an email expressing interest in conducting the study. The Assistant Superintendent approved the study and, of the three schools that met the criteria, recommended two schools for me to contact -- the K-3 schools, Niyoron Elementary and Binalo Elementary. In addition, the Assistant Superintendent recommended I contact one other district leader, the district reading specialist. Contact with these potential participants was made through email. The district reading specialist emailed me, and we set up a date for the interview. The two principals contacted by a follow-up phone call within a week of the email, also scheduled interviews. In both the email sent to potential participants and the follow-up phone calls, I explained the study and the need to conduct interviews.

Teacher leaders participated in this study. Teacher leaders generally were defined as having a certain area of expertise in their field with some responsibility to assist in building teacher capacity in that area. Teacher leaders are responsible for planning or facilitated some part of the professional development at the site. Examples of a teacher leader include a literacy coach, Reading Recovery teacher, or a teacher who assumes a leadership role in sharing best practices. I was specifically looking for teacher leaders in the area of literacy.

### **Research Methodology**

This section discusses the types of data collected and how the data were analyzed. Themes emerged from the data and descriptions of them are included as part of this section. At

the conclusion of this chapter, I will discuss the limitations and measures I took to enhance trustworthiness.

**Data sources.** Creswell (2003) describes four basic types of data -- interviewing, observing, obtaining documents, and collecting audiovisual materials. For this study, the data collected include interviewing district and building level leaders, securing public documents from the participants and from online sites, and analyzing videos of professional development sessions. Creswell (2007) describes how in recent years other methods have been used, such as journaling. Following the first round interviews I journaled to capture the settings, reactions, and general impressions.

**Interviews.** The participants chosen for interviews were selected based on a criterion sampling, a method where the potential participants meet a pre-specified criteria (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The criteria for interviewees were they have had direct participation in creating professional development opportunities for teachers in the area of literacy.

The Assistant Superintendent of Instruction identified a district level teacher leader and two principals. Prior to all interviews, the participants were given the University of Wisconsin - Madison's Internal Review Boards Consent Form (Appendix C) to read and sign. During each interview, the interviewee was asked about teacher leaders and additional people were identified to be included in this study. In this way, snowball sampling was employed, expanding the pool of people interviewed so as to better understand the issue (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The teachers identified at Binalo Elementary included two reading specialists. The teachers identified at Niyoron Elementary included a reading specialist and two classroom teachers. (Following the interviews, one classroom teacher's transcript and field notes were eliminated from the study

because the teacher did not act as a leader in professional development in the area of literacy, although the candidate was a teacher leader in the area of professional development for math.)

Interviews followed a semi-structured format. With permission by the participants, I audio-recorded the interview using a LiveScribe pen (<http://livescribe.com>). During the interviews, I took notes on key points made by the interviewee. The interview audio recordings and the notes were linked together and synced with Evernote, a password protected web based application. Using Evernote allowed me to go back during the analysis stage and hear what the interviewee was saying at the exact moment I took notes. Whenever, during our interview, the participant said something that I wanted to make sure I remembered, I would jot a phrase or word to link the statement to my notes. I could later go back any time and listen to what was actually said.

All first round interviews were face-to-face and took place in the participant's setting and occurred between March and April of 2013. Settings included the district office, principal's office, classrooms, and offices located at the school site. Prior to interviews, I developed a protocol with questions that were focused but allowed flexibility for the interviewee to expand answers or diverge with additional relevant information related to professional development (Appendix D, E). If I needed to verify something, such as a start date of one of the participants, I emailed the participant. I followed-up with two participants to clarify and ask additional information.

**Field notes.** Bogdan and Biklen (2003) suggest collecting field notes that incorporate and aspire to capture the participants, dialogue, setting, events, activities, and reflections on the observer's behavior. Following each interview or site visit, I spent time journaling and reflecting

on some of the aspects of the event that could not be recorded, so as to further enhance and present a fuller, deeper understanding of the site and what is happening there. I collected the field notes in LiveScribe through a combination of audio recordings and written text.

**Documents.** I collected and analyzed documents including those identified by Creswell (2007) as keeping a journal and public documents. The public documents I used as part of this study include documents used by the teachers as part of the professional development, the district's strategic action plan, the books referenced by the participants, newspaper articles, and digital media of professional learning opportunities that were created by the district and accessible on YouTube.

**Data Analysis.** After the interviews, I began my analysis following strategies described by Miles and Huberman in Creswell (2007). The strategies they suggest are the following:

- Write margin notes in fieldnotes
- Write reflective passages in notes
- Draft a summary sheet on fieldnotes
- Make metaphors
- Write codes, memos
- Note patterns and themes
- Count frequency of codes
- Factor, note relations among variables, build a logical chain of evidence
- Make contrasts and comparisons (p. 149).

Following the interviews, I transcribed the audio recordings. Initially I had the assistant superintendent's interview and the district reading specialist's interview professionally

transcribed. When I looked at the transcripts, I noticed that there were parts that were labeled inaudible and formal words such as people and places that were not correctly spelled, although they were phonetically correct. Using the LiveScribe pen, the interactive notebook, and the digital transcript, I listened to the audio recording and made edits to the transcript. I then printed each document and listened again to the recordings making notes on the hard copy if there were changes or things I wanted to remember about what they participant had said.

I decided to transcribe the remaining seven interviews myself. I listened to a slowed down version of each audio recording and transcribed it into a word processing program. Using the interactive notebook, as I moved through the recording, I could pause, jump forward or back, or tap anywhere on the paper to get to a specific part of the recording. After the initial transcription, I followed this same process of listening to the recording and editing the digital version and then printing it out and listening again, making edits on the hard copy. All transcribed documents were sent to the participants in a pdf format as a member check.

At the beginning of the categorizing or coding process began, I used a priori codes. I used the codes from my theoretical model: learning communities, leadership, resources, data, learning design, implementation, and outcomes. I did not limit myself to these seven codes during the first cycle of coding. As new codes emerged, I added them (Creswell 2007). By the end of the first cycle of coding I had twenty-two codes.

I uploaded the transcribed documents into a password-protected web based application called Dedoose, a program for analyzing qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research (<http://dedoose.com>). I began with coding the assistant superintendent's document first because she supervised the curriculum and instruction department and was responsible for the

professional development that was provided. Before coding, I listened to the audio recording again and followed along with the written text. This was done to help remind me clearly of the interview, including, context, emphasis, tone, and comments made. I then went back to Dedoose and coded the documents according to the a priori codes. Following the coding, I created an analytic memo in Dedoose with the date noted. In these notes I included any new emerging codes or themes and things I was wondering about, as well as items I would need to follow-up on during second round interviews through requests for documents or clarifying questions. This process was then repeated by coding the district reading specialist.

As I began the two school sites, I did each site separately beginning with an interview of the principal, then the building reading specialist(s), and lastly teacher leaders who were not reading specialists. Focusing on each building separately in its entirety allowed me to develop a focused picture of that specific case and any new codes that may be arising out of it.

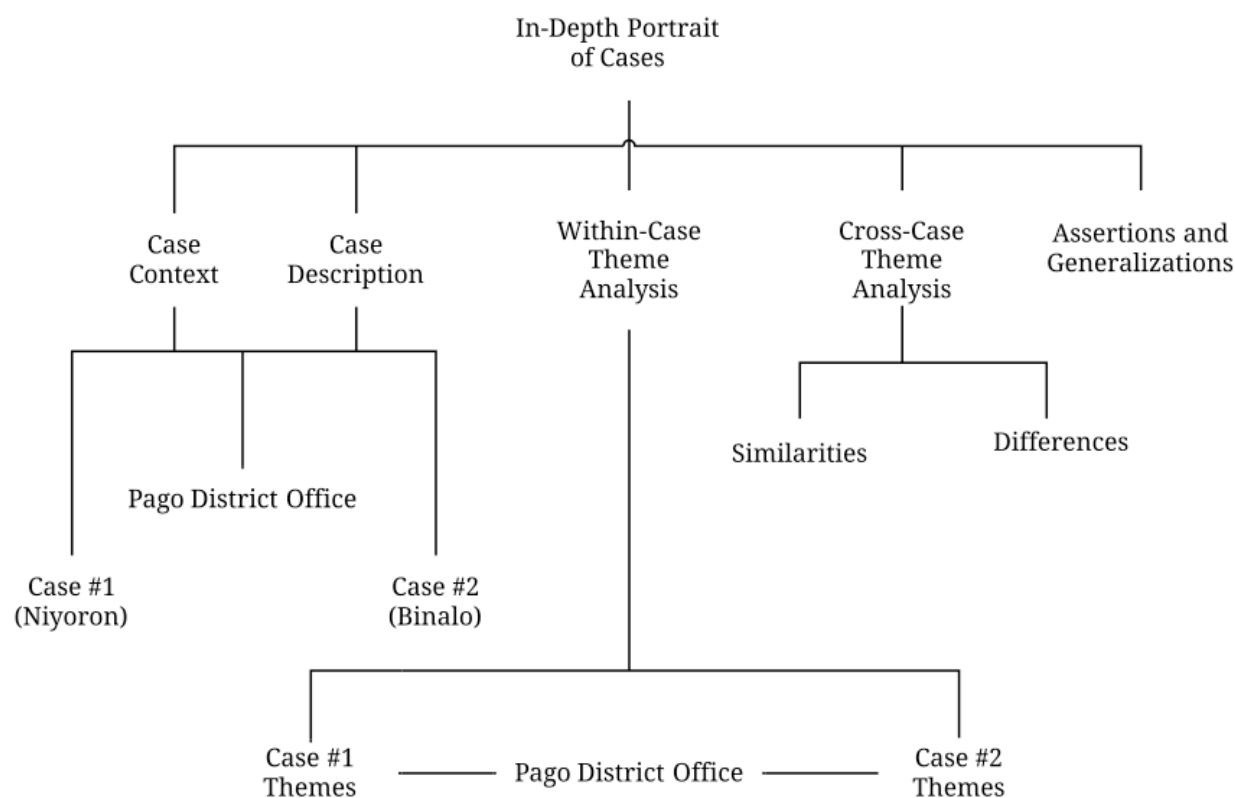
Following the first cycle of coding, I looked at the codes and began a second coding. Finding some codes too expansive, I reorganized and reanalyzed the data, developing an additional 5 codes for a total of 27 codes. I read each transcript several times to become familiar with it in its entirety before looking for themes (Agar, 1980). Once I was satisfied that the data were reanalyzed and reorganized into codes that were related, I began looking for themes and sub-themes. As part of the analysis, I described what had seen by writing descriptions that were situated, contextual, and included the person, place, and event included (Creswell 2007). I relied on the analysis process as described by Miles and Huberman (1994), of “data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification.” (p. 10)

To facilitate understanding, Yin (2006) suggests starting with the questions that one is trying to understand. Beginning with a small question, I looked for evidence in the data, began drawing a tentative conclusion and considered how to display the data so that others could access it. Next, I turned to larger questions and continued repeating the process until arriving at the main research question. This was done for each individual case.

Initially when I drafted my proposal, I intended to study two cases and then conduct a cross case analysis. What I found through the coding, theming, and the analysis process is that the district office site acted in a very different way than the two school sites. The district office site is contextually different from the school sites but essential for understanding each school case. The district office site is like a hub, that is the two school sites are independent of each other but both are dependent on the district office site. For this reason, I decided to add it as its own chapter preceding the chapters of the two school sites. As a result, when analyzing the cases for similarities and differences, the district office and the role it plays is woven throughout the summary chapter.

Creswell (2007) created a figure capturing the pieces of a multi-site case study and how the data were analyzed (p. 172). This figure had to be adapted to reflect the unique relationship the district office has with the two school sites.

Figure 4



**Description of themes.** Four overarching themes emerged from the data that describes how district and building level leaders planned for and provided professional development for staff. The specific descriptions of these are found in the Pago School District (Chapter 4), Niyoron Elementary (Chapter 5), Binalo Elementary (Chapter 6), and the Summary (Chapter 7). From these themes, descriptions of the specific steps taken by the leaders is discussed in the findings section (Chapter 7).

***Leading and staying the course.*** The overarching theme of leading and staying the course refers to the ways administrators and teachers provided leadership for their district and school site. Additionally, it refers to the ways the leaders planned for and followed a road map for sustained, ongoing professional development.

***Sustaining coherent and differentiated learning opportunities.*** The overarching theme of sustaining coherent and differentiated professional learning opportunities describes in detail how the professional learning was structured by painting a clear picture of what it looked like at each site. It also describes professional development that occurred over time, building on previous learning, focusing on data, and responding to staff needs.

***Fostering relationships and collaboration.*** The overarching theme of fostering relationships and collaboration refers to the intentional interactions and opportunities for staff to engage in discussions about instruction, data, assessment, and students.

***Building teacher and administrator capacity.*** The overarching theme of building teacher and administrator capacity refers to knowledge, skills, and dispositions of teachers and principals growing as a result of professional learning opportunities.

**Ethical considerations.** During the stages of research, I informed participants of the purpose of the study and that pseudonyms would be used to maintain confidentiality. Pseudonyms were used for the district name, each school's name, and each participant's names. In addition, the participants were given the opportunity to check transcripts for accuracy, and they were informed that the records would be destroyed seven years after the dissertation was completed. The transcripts were stored using initials in lieu of their names and were password protected.

**Enhancing trustworthiness.** Qualitative researchers use at least two methods to increase trustworthiness. In my study I used triangulation, member checks, and rich, thick descriptions.

The triangulation method was used throughout the analysis. Creswell and Miller (2000) defines this as the process where the one looks for “convergence among multiple and different

sources of information to form themes or categories in a study.” (p. 126) Throughout the analysis process, the periodic comparing and contrasting of sources -- the transcripts, teacher handouts, strategic plan document, online artifacts, and videos -- trustworthiness by either confirming or disconfirming themes.

A second method used throughout the study was member checking. Member checking involves enlisting participants to help determine the credibility of the case. Creswell and Miller (2000) describe it as “with the lens focused on participants, the researchers systematically check the data and the narrative account.” (p. 127) All transcripts were given to the participants to review, and follow-up conversations occurred throughout the analysis. In addition, each participant from each site received a pdf copy of the chapter focused on their site to review for accuracy.

The third method used was writing with thick, rich description. “Thick descriptions are deep, dense, detailed accounts” (Denzin, as cited in Creswell and Miller, 2000, p. 128). According to Creswell and Miller, the goal is to have others feel like they visualize and experience it. It involves “locating individuals in specific situations; bringing a relationship or interaction alive between two or more persons; or providing a detailed rendering of how people feel” (Denzin, as cited in Creswell and Miller, 2000, p. 129). Throughout the case study, I used participants’ words and interwove their accounts of what was happening to create a detailed narrative.

**Limitations of the study.** My own paradigmatic framework shapes my thinking and view of a situation and can therefore, be a limitation of this study. In addition, because I have been an educator in Wisconsin for 22 years, I have a network of other professionals. I previously

worked with and have maintained contact with one of the participants of this study. Lastly, because this study was focused on only two sites and involved participation by a small number of their respective leaders of professional development participating, it is highly contextual and the results and findings may not be generalized to other school sites.

**Significance of the study.** The aim of this study was to add to the field by providing insight into which elements practitioners are paying attention to in the area of professional development as evidenced by high achievement in the area of literacy. First and foremost, I am a practitioner with a desire to better understand what others are doing in the field. This has led me to become a researcher and to add to the field by better understanding how those selected in the case study have created spaces and supported professional learning for their staff. As a principal, I regularly receive and read books and articles from professional journals such as *Educational Leadership* and *Principal*, as well as online sources that describe the latest trends in professional development and other areas of leadership. Qualitative and quantitative research are both frequently cited in materials in the education field. Nine quantitative studies identified as meeting the gold standard in research have highlighted elements in professional development (Yoon et. al 2007). Some researchers, such as Guskey (2010), have called for additional empirical data to expand the field. While quantitative research gives us one view of what is happening, qualitative research can give us another view as well. Phillips in Serlin (2006), highlights the nature of education research when he states in Chapter One:

Education is a social process (or family of processes) that is open to sociocultural values, purposes, and needs and interests with the work of teachers and administrators, and the efforts of students to learn, being affected by the beliefs all of them hold, their values, their degree of motivation, and their sense of self-efficacy. Educational research that is to

do justice to the nature of the phenomena being investigated must correspondingly be wide in scope. (p. 19)

As a practitioner, I read materials about how to develop highly effective professional development. The articles often present a clinical view and a checklist of how to provide professional development. The stories behind the real life settings are often left out, and the rationale behind decisions about professional development are often not present. The decision-making behind the how, why, and when is not to be found and the reader is left to try to decipher why leaders in schools made the decisions the way they did. This study aims to add to the field by sharing two specific case studies focusing on how the leaders planned professional development, supported it, and sustained it. It aims, in their voices to capture a glimpse of their accomplishments from the ground level.

In the next three chapters I present the professional development from the district level (Chapter 4) and each elementary school (Chapters 5-6). In each of these chapters, I include their words as they described professional development in the area of literacy to bring to life their work. Their reflections are captured throughout the four themes that eventually distill down to the steps taken by these leaders to provide effective professional development.

## **Chapter IV: The Pago School District**

*(Pago -- Chamorro for Hibiscus, a small flowering tree)*

In this chapter I provide an overview of the Pago School District, beginning with a description of the community and the demographics of the school district. Next, I present background information on the two district-level leaders who described professional learning in their district. Lastly, I examine from the perspectives of both the school board and the district office, the integral role of leaders at the district level in providing highly effective professional development for the school sites. This is explored using the four overarching themes of:

- Leading and staying the course;
- Sustaining coherent and differentiated professional learning opportunities;
- Developing teacher and administrator capacity;
- Fostering relationships and collaboration.

### **Community and District Context**

The Pago School District is located in a Wisconsin community of about 37,000 residents. The community is predominantly white (about 70%). Hispanics and African Americans are the next largest ethnic groups with nearly equal residents of each. Over the past ten years, the overall population has remained stable.

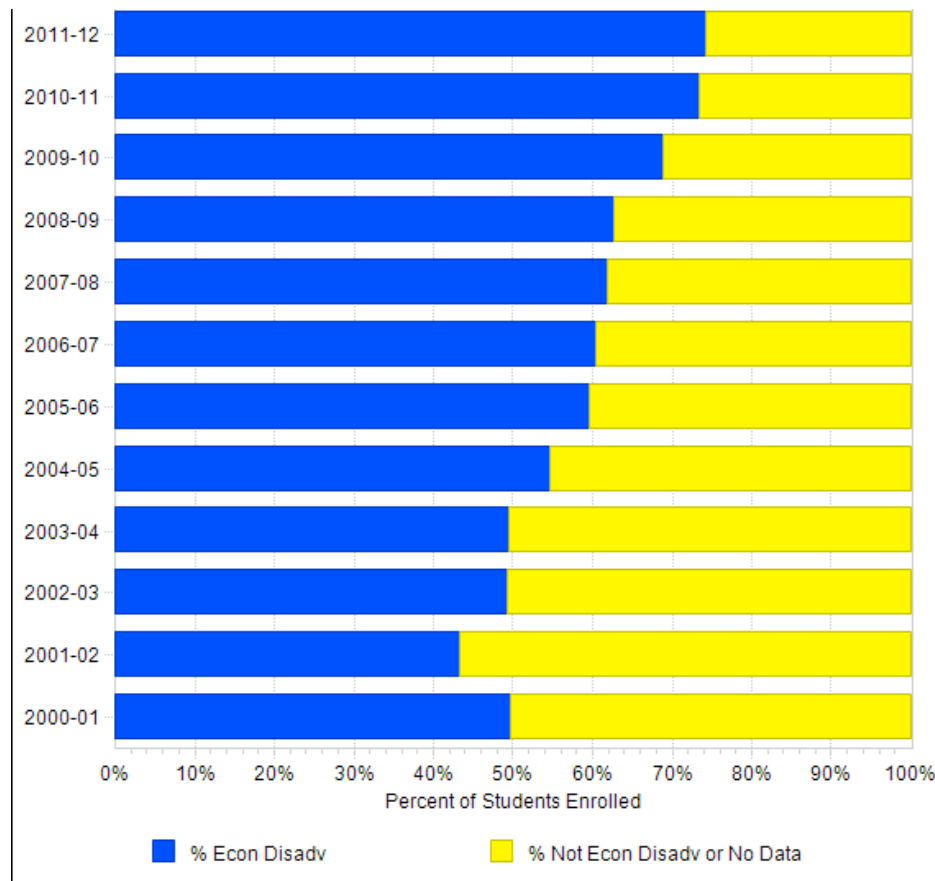
The Pago School District has a student population of nearly 7,000 students. For the past 15 years, enrollment numbers have not significantly varied. The student body is about 40% white, 30% Hispanic, 25% African American, and the remaining 5% is comprised of American Indian, Pacific Islander, Asian, and other races. In the past 10 years, the number of Hispanic students has significantly increased from 12% in 2001 to 30% in 2011. The percentage of students identified as African American has had the least variance (about 28% in 2001, about

23% in 2011) and there has been a significant decrease in students identified as white (58% in 2001, 30% in 2011).

The Pago School District has seen an increase in students who are English Language Learners (ELL). In 2011 about 16% of students were ELLs, as compared to 7% in 2001. The trend line shows a near steady increase in ELL students with the vast majority of the ELL students having Spanish as their first language (94% of ELLs were Spanish speaking in 2011).

Looking at the students identified as economically disadvantaged, there is a stark difference between 2001 and 2011 from 50% to nearly 75% with nearly every year since 2003 having more students identified as economically disadvantaged.

Figure 5



Data taken from the DPI WINSS site (<http://winss.dpi.wi.gov/>)

## **District Level Leaders**

**Dr. Lisa Anders.** Dr. Lisa Anders is the Assistant Superintendent of Instruction for the Pago School District. Her responsibilities include overseeing the Curriculum and Instruction Department and the professional development it provides to the staff. Her staff includes two curriculum directors, three coordinators (reading, math, and ESL), a data person, an instructional technology person, and three secretaries. Dr. Anders was hired for this position in 2011. She began her career as a teacher, and after 11 years became an administrator. For the past 13 years, she has served as a curriculum director for several districts, and she has also worked with an educational agency in Wisconsin. Dr. Anders brings to her job a passion for social justice issues and a commitment to help leaders influence student achievement for traditionally marginalized populations. Through administrative coursework, Dr. Anders has read extensively on this topic and acted as a researcher looking at social justice issues.

**Sherry Warren.** Sherry Warren is a district level reading specialist who has taught for 14 years. She has been with the Pago School District since 2009. Prior to coming to the Pago School District, Ms. Warren held classroom positions as a teacher in first and second grade classrooms. She also was a Reading Recovery and Title I teacher. She has taught in Wisconsin and two other states and has a master's degree focusing on a running record clinic -- a form of professional development that she has created. As a district reading specialist, Ms. Warren works with building level reading specialists, teachers, and provides professional development to staff.

## **Providing Effective Professional Development**

The remainder of this chapter focuses on what the district level leaders do to provide high quality professional development, first from the perspective of how the school board and administration charted the course through strategic planning, and then from the perspective of

what has occurred at the district level with Ms. Warren leading professional development for the district.

### **Leading and Staying the Course - The School Board and the Administration**

The school board and the administrators developed a strategic plan that articulated what the district would do to provide professional development for staff. This section describes the ways the school board and administrators accomplished this through the strategic plan.

**Creating the road map.** The strategic plan for the Pago School District lays out a road map for the theme “leading and staying the course” by subsuming the other themes of developing teacher and administrator capacity, fostering relationships and collaboration, and sustaining coherent and differentiated learning opportunities. In this section there is an outline for how the strategic plan, adopted by the school board in 2010, sets the course for these themes. After this description, I describe the district perspective of what is occurring, through the lens of each of these themes.

In 2010, when the Pago School Board adopted its strategic plan, it included parts directly focusing on professional development for the teaching staff and administrators. Like many districts, it created a mission statement and belief statement. The Pago School District also adopted a parameters statement, including a clearly articulated emphasis on professional development. “No new program or service will be accepted unless it is consistent with the strategic plan, benefits clearly justify the costs, and provisions are made for professional development and program evaluation.” This parameter was a clear signal that anything new must fit within the strategic plan and professional development must be provided. With current curriculum and instructional strategies in place, the board created another parameter tying building-level decisions to the strategic plan. It stated “school based decisions and improvement

plans must be consistent with the district strategic plan.” The specifics of how the strategic plan is tied to professional development are addressed in the following discussion of the themes.

*Strategies focused on developing teacher capacity.* The strategic plan itself has seven strategies, with each strategy including an outline of action plans and steps. Two strategies of the strategic plan addresses this topic. One strategy focuses on assessment, instructional strategies, and interventions to improve student achievement. Within this strategy are three action steps directly related to professional development. Of these steps, one is to “provide staff development on Universal Instruction, focusing on problem solving and implementation of effective universal instruction and differentiation” and another is to “provide staff development on Targeted and Selected Interventions, focusing on problem solving and implementation of effective universal instruction and differentiation.” The action plan included updates on progress and in one update it listed professional development in the area of guided reading. Within this strategy, the third action step is to “provide professional educators with training that improves their ability to instruct responsively.”

The other strategy addressing professional development focuses on engagement and high academic achievement. The action steps include building a district-wide intervention system to “provide ongoing Professional Development for staff regarding research based interventions (universal, selected and targeted).” Evidence of progress on action steps included professional development examples specifically in literacy was listed as KidBiz, Achieve, and Empower, Odyssey, Soar, LLI, Guided Reading. As part of this strategy, another action step is to “provide ongoing differentiated professional development in research-based instructional strategies.”

Within the strategy, building teacher capacity not only involves the district leaders making decisions about what they think teachers needed. Soliciting teacher input into their needs

is another way to further teacher development. Within this strategy, the action plan addresses building teacher capacity by staff members developing a professional growth plan with goals aligned with two focus areas.

***Developing a critical eye -- administrators as observers.*** The strategic plan calls for an observation form to be developed to identify “district-wide expectations for research-based instructional strategies to be implemented in classrooms that engage students in learning.” Administrators are to use these forms “during classroom ‘walk-throughs’ and/or classroom observations.” However, with a focus on professional development, the strategic plan also lays out an action step to “train administrators to use the evaluation system to improve their own instructional leadership, thus better supporting teacher growth.” The plan was updated to reflect that iObservation, a web based application designed for professional development goals and observation feedback, is the tool used to conduct the “walk-throughs”.

***Dedicating time for purposeful collaboration.*** The strategic plan provides a path towards relationships and collaboration. One action step that was achieved was full implementation of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) at each site with a frequency of two times per week. To provide guidance on what the PLCs would do, an action step states the district will “focus Professional Learning Communities around these three strategies: Instructional Strategies, Relationship Building, and Cultural Responsive Teaching Strategies.”

***Sustaining coherent and differentiated learning opportunities.*** The action plan lays out systems to ensure that professional development is sustained over time. One action plan step is to “renegotiate the [union] contract to include more time for professional development.” This was achieved in 2011 with the provision that there would be two professional learning community meetings per week and, over the school year, two professional development days. Another

mechanism to ensure all staff receive professional development, is to look at new hires. In the strategy aimed at engagement, one action step is to “focus new employee professional growth opportunities on these three strategies: Instructional Strategies, Relationship Building, and Cultural Responsive Teaching Strategies.” Although literacy is not specifically addressed, one could reasonably infer the step includes literacy as part of instructional strategies.

To sustain and differentiate professional development, the strategic action plan also focuses on teachers determining their own goals. One action step, in the engagement strategy, is to “develop a yearly personal, professional growth plan by each staff member which targets two of the three focus areas.”

Providing feedback on progress is an important part of furthering professional growth. As part of this engagement strategy, the strategic plan calls for the district to “develop an observation form which identifies district-wide expectations for research-based instructional strategies to be implemented in classrooms that engage students in learning.” This form allows teachers to examine their practices in relation to the district-wide expectations and then plan for further development. A tool to receive feedback is referenced in the plan. The tool is the web-based application iObservation that allows teachers to receive specific feedback in relation to progress toward goals directly aligned to the district-wide expectations.

In building teacher capacity, making learning opportunities available to staff is critical. In the strategy focusing on assessment, instructional strategies, and intervention strategies, the district plan says the district will “provide professional educators with training that improves their ability to instruct responsively.” In the school year 2011-2012, there were 70 professional development opportunities, although not all at the elementary level nor all in literacy.

To sustain professional development and to ensure that it provides a set of coherent learning opportunities, evaluating effectiveness is an important component. One action step was to “evaluate and revise a new professional development calendar annually.” The update notes that Dr. Anders completed this action step.

**Summary.** The district’s strategic plan paved the way and provided guidance for professional development. With the plan articulating the strategies and action steps, it charted the course and gave direction to the district and building level leaders to provide and to sustain professional learning opportunities, to build capacity, and to provide time for collaboration through PLCs.

These four themes will be re-examined from the district perspective looking at what the district level leaders did in alignment with the strategic plan in creating and providing professional development.

### **Leading and Staying the Course - The District Level Leadership (District Reading Specialist)**

This section, Leading and Staying the Course, outlines the leadership demonstrated by Ms. Warren, beginning in 2008 and continuing through the spring of 2013. This section will demonstrate how Ms. Warren led in planning for and delivering professional development and how her actions aligned to the district’s strategic plan.

**“Data informs our instruction.” Developing the running record clinic.** Dr. Anders oversees the Pago School District’s Curriculum and Instruction Department. Ms. Warren works in this department as a district reading specialist and her primary role is developing and delivering professional development. Above her desk there are shelves with binder after binder filled with the professional development courses she has created over the years. Throughout the

interview Ms. Warren painted a picture of literacy professional development in the district going back to 2008. Much of what is described in this section is a direct reflection of how Ms. Warren has created professional development and facilitated leading professional development while following the district strategic plan.

Prior to the strategic plan, Ms. Warren led a five part running record clinic, a seven hour course she developed. A running record is an assessment to gather information on a student's reading level. During the interview, Ms. Warren said, "I believe that data informs our instruction. It is so critical." She went on to say that it is critical to begin with the "universal level," a reference to the instruction for all students. She led the district in a clinic that taught staff how to conduct a running record, how to interpret the data, and how to question or give prompting strategies. This clinic was initially provided for elementary teachers, and each year all new teachers are required to attend, teachers who wanted a refresher could attend, or teachers attended at the principal's request. With the requirement that all new staff attend the clinic it was aligned with the strategic plan through the action step "focus new employee professional growth opportunities on . . . instructional strategies . . ."

Another way the running record clinic was aligned to the district plan was by assisting staff in knowing their students through the collection of data regarding the students reading level and reading behaviors. Assessment is the first step in planning for instruction. This clinic fit within the plan by giving the teachers tools for planning instruction and "their ability to instruct responsively."

**Making data work the hardest -- moving to guided reading.** In the fall of 2011, the district developed an educational services plan, spanning from September 2011 to August 2012. It identified the coaching of guided reading at the elementary level from September 2011 through

May 2012. Ms. Warren determined that the teachers were ready to move from gathering data through the running records to instruction.

Then we realized ... now we're going to take this data, where we are going to be able to make this data work the hardest and give it the best bang for the buck would be in guided reading. So then our next shift was to go to guided reading training.

One person could not possibly fulfill all the professional development needs for the elementary schools. Working with her supervisor, Ms. Warren developed a plan for the year of what needed to be covered. Next the building reading specialists and Ms. Warren met every Friday throughout the year to focus and guide the work of the department. This reading specialist team acted as its own Professional Learning Community. From here on it will be referred to as the Reading Specialists PLC. In 2011, the Friday meetings focused on balanced literacy. Specifically the team led by Ms. Warren was responsible for reading, researching, reflecting, and developing absolutes or position statements regarding interactive read-alouds, shared reading, independent reading, and guided reading. After the creation of absolutes, the professional development had to be created, delivered, and followed up by coaching. Guided reading professional development was the focus for the 2011-2012 school year.

In the 2012-2013 school year the focus continued to be on the four components of balanced literacy. The Reading Specialists PLC continued to meet every Friday. Ms. Warren shared that they followed the process of “read/reflect, develop absolutes, create [professional development], deliver [professional development], and coach” in refining their guided reading practices as to the “behaviors and understandings to notice, teach, and support in a guided reading lesson.” This professional development was delivered at the monthly district-wide PLCs

for teachers and at elementary schools during an intensive 10 week coaching and additional follow-up coaching throughout the year, as needed.

**Summary.** Ms. Warren and the building level reading specialists paved the way for professional development. The Reading Specialists PLC followed the strategic plan when it created balanced literacy professional development “on universal instruction . . . and implementation of effective universal instruction and differentiation” by creating the guided reading professional development. The team members focused on providing “professional educators with training that improves their ability to instruct responsively” by helping staff recognize the behaviors and understandings of their readers.

### **Sustain Coherent, Differentiated Learning Opportunities -- The District Level Leaders**

The previous section described the specific ways that the leaders followed the district’s strategic plan from 2008 through the spring of 2013. This section examines in more detail the methods the district level and building level reading specialists used to sustain coherent and differentiated professional learning opportunities. A picture will be presented of how this was sustained over time, along with a close up view of some of the specific targeted sessions showing how the program was tailored to meet participants’ needs. The voices of the interviewees will paint a rich portrait of what occurred and how the building of professional learning on one another gives coherence to their learning opportunities.

One aspect of professional development mandated by the district level, the practice of follow-up coaching, has not yet been discussed in depth, because it focuses on the building level. Although this will be discussed in greater detail in later chapters, it is worth briefly discussing here because although the professional development stemmed from the district level, the follow-

up coaching was an integral part of the total professional development experience for teachers.

During Ms. Warren's interview, she stated:

We always believe that whatever [professional development] we offer, we need to follow up with coaching. That's just a philosophical statement that I believe because [of] Dr. Laub's work [on instructional coaching] and that system of change. They talk about . . . they can go to a [professional development session] but . . . only 5% of the people will implement it. But if you follow up with coaching 85% of the people will implement it.

The following sections there will include references to professional development that occurred at the district level and continued into the building level. In the building level case descriptions, more details about the coaching at those particular sites will be explained in detail.

**Scaffolding teachers' learning -- the running record clinic.** Beginning with the running record clinic in 2008 and continuing each year, all teachers of reading were required to attend the five part running record clinic. This professional development has been conducted yearly, and Ms. Warren estimated that she has worked with about "600 teachers all 7 hours total." In the first year alone, Ms. Warren estimated, she conducted the running record clinic with 400 teachers. Although Ms. Warren led the clinics, all building level reading specialists attended one of the clinics and were responsible for following up by coaching at the building level.

To support this type of professional development, Ms. Warren allowed for professional learning during the school day by working with the building secretaries to arrange substitutes (Bredeson, 2003). Her limit was 26 teachers in a session. With 10 to 20 substitutes available to cover classes for each session, the substitutes taught in a classroom for 3.5 hours while the classroom teacher attended professional development. Some staff such as special education teachers or English as a Second Language teachers did not require substitutes or someone else

covered their classroom, allowing for more than 20 participants. Having substitutes that would cover classes allowed for two sessions to be run in any given day with 3.5 hours in the morning and 3.5 hours in the afternoon. Each substitute would cover two different classrooms in a day.

In part one, the first 3.5 hours, Ms. Warren said the focus is on “just how to do it. How do you actually do it?” Following the 3.5 hours, teachers were given an assignment to “complete two or three running records with a student before they come back that next week.” Generally, Ms. Warren did no more than two clinics in a week due to other responsibilities with her building level reading specialists, which will be discussed in the later section regarding building capacity.

Between part one and part two of the running record clinic, typically scheduled a week apart, the teachers who were part of the clinic conducted their running records with their students. The building level reading specialists sustained and differentiated their support with teachers by following up on the teachers’ specific needs at the building level. Ms. Warren described it as:

The reading specialist is then out there doing the follow-up coaching with them. . . “I know you went to the running record training last week” . . . Sometimes we’ve done it where they do an inter-rater reliability. And [if] the teacher’s not ready . . . the reading specialist . . . and the teacher sit [side-by-side] and they do the running record at the same time.

Although this is happening at the building sites, it is included here in the district perspective because it is part of the cohesive picture of sustaining professional development over time and differentiating for the needs of a specific teacher.

Teachers returned the following week to the running record clinic with their quantitative data -- the running records of two or three students. Day two of the running record clinic focused

on the qualitative data, or -- as Ms. Warren refers to it -- the “meat of the purpose of it.” Day two focused on how to analyze the running record. Ms. Warren took the teachers in-depth with analysis of a running record.

We talked about the cuing system, MSV . . . what I found is these teachers really know a lot about . . . comprehension strategies but they don’t understand strategic action which is what leads you to comprehension. So, what I have to do is back up and say, “Alright, do you understand that it first starts with self monitoring and then searching and then cross-checking and then confirming or self-correcting?” So, we spent a ton of time on that so they know what they’re watching for on the running record. See, the first week they’re doing the running record, they were just worried about the . . . coding but what I’m trying to get them to do is, “While you’re coding you got to watch how they move on text and why did they go back?” Because something inside of them went “Whoa, it didn’t make sense or it didn’t sound right, or it didn’t look right.”

Helping teachers understand strategic action was the first step. Once Ms. Warren was confident that the teachers had this piece, professional development continued to evolve deeper with scaffolding in the second part:

Now that I understand strategic action, how do I analyze this running record for meaning, structure, visual information? The last step is how do I choose a prompt to get them to either reinforce what they’re doing or what prompt should come out of my mouth to get them to move more strategically? So what I’m trying to help teachers understand is you aren’t going to get deeper comprehension if you don’t understand -- if you don’t watch your reader move on a text. You got to know how they problem solve on text, how they work through tricky parts because while they’re working through

tricky parts, it's evidence of comprehension too. Because they wouldn't have stopped if it didn't make sense.

The Pago School District sustains professional learning for all their teachers of reading by scaffolding teachers' learning by using their data gathered from their students and helping them acquire the skills both to administer the running record and then, more importantly, to analyze it for strategic action. Following the running record clinic, the coaches at the school sites followed up with teachers.

**Scaffolding teachers' learning -- guided reading.** With the completion of the district position statements, the reading specialists wanted the teachers to come back in the fall ready for professional development. Near the end of the school year, during the spring of 2011, Ms. Warren emailed teachers articles to read over the summer. The reading specialists decided to flip the instruction so when teachers came back in the fall they were ready to discuss the articles with common background knowledge. Throughout the fall semester, teachers participated in a variety of literacy focused experiences, such as interactive read aloud, shared reading, and independent reading. The format was always read ahead of time/discuss/view a DVD example/and then reflection questions.

With all teachers of reading having developed their skills in acquiring running record data with fidelity, the district leaders turned their focus toward guided reading. The strategic action plan calls for professional development to be provided any time new materials were purchased. At the elementary level, the district had recently purchased Journeys -- a set of guided reading lessons and students books published by Houghton Mifflin. Through a combination of summer professional development and professional development during the day, teachers continued to

develop the skills and knowledge in teaching literacy and guided reading. The guided reading professional development occurred over a two year period.

In the summer of 2011 teachers attended the guiding reading professional development. The framework for guided reading and its components were presented to the teachers. Each piece of the framework was presented in the same way:

We talk about it a little bit. Watch a DVD clip of what it's going to look like. Then they take notes on it. We digest it. We say, "What worked on this"? And they have a little reflection page . . . to talk about what worked in this.

The Journeys materials are broken into sections, such as introducing the text, reading, discussing, writing, and language development. For each section, the professional development was structured so that teachers had a chance to learn about each one.

Using the information teachers had learned from the running record clinic, Ms. Warren scaffolded to the next level by examining in a guided reading lesson how to support the meaning, structure, and visual. Emphasizing the use of data throughout the lesson, Ms. Warren drew on previous experiences to extend to new experiences. Ms. Warren described it as:

"Remember the running record clinic? Remember when we were having to look for strategic action? When you're teaching -- when your students are reading," and I had to tell them about our expectations are . . . that you are there heart, body, mind, and soul. You have to be completely physically and emotionally present to be able to prompt for strategic action in that moment.

Ms. Warren sets up the expectations of what that guided reading is going to look like and what the teacher is going to be doing. The teachers watch the video and then in a small group, they practice it.

In 2011, a formative assessment data piece called Touchpoints was added to the guided reading lessons. Ms. Warren described what it would look like if teachers were doing it with fidelity:

I have a post-it on [the student book] and I say, “Joey, when you get to page 5 you need to tap [Ms. Warren] so I can do the Touchpoint running record on you.” So while the lesson’s happening because I’m listening, listening. He taps me. I turn. I do this little 100 count running record. I have maybe a 30 second conversation so I can get some within text in that moment. And then I go back and I keep prompting. I keep talking. I keep working with the group. So this takes as long as it takes him to read it and then you’re done.

In this example, Ms. Warren is gradually adding more to what teachers need to do in a guided reading lesson. She models clearly, even using the words she would use if she were with a student.

In 2012, the guided reading professional development continued with a focus on using *The Continuum of Literacy Learning* by Fountas and Pinnell (2011) to better understand students’ behaviors and understandings of the various levels they may be at in their reading progression. Fountas and Pinnell have created a system labeled A through Z to help determine where students are at. *The Continuum of Literacy Learning* identifies the skills and behaviors a teacher would see for a student in a given level. It outlines the skills students need to acquire in that level to be ready for the next level. The reason the leadership at the Pago School District decided to continue in this avenue of professional learning was because as Ms. Warren stated, we realized “we were getting too many teachers caught on just the accuracy rate and comprehension score and not going deep into the behaviors and understandings.” This decision reflects the

commitment to build professional learning opportunities based on where teachers were at and where they needed to be to help students attain high levels in literacy.

To prepare the professional development, Ms. Warren used online resources provided by Heinemann, the publisher of *The Continuum of Literacy Learning*. Ms. Warren shared that she often uses this online resource and simply needs to differentiate the materials to fit the needs of the teachers in the Pago School District. The members of the Reading Specialists PLC worked together to prepare for the delivery and support of professional development. A detailed description follows in the building capacity section.

The goal, Ms. Warren noted, was to teach “them how to unpack the behaviors for understanding and we linked it to the common core because they have to know how to do close reading.” The district leaders had been reading *Pathways to the Common Core* by Calkins, Ehrenworth and Lehman (2012) and recognized that they had some things in place and could celebrate, but that there was more work to be done to help all children learn at high levels. *Pathways to the Common Core* states, “When the goal is to maximize achievement, it helps for the learner to have a crystal-clear target in mind and to be given concrete instructional feedback about his or her progress toward that target” (Calkins, et. al., 2012). The leadership at the Pago School District used this quote as their lead in to teachers to say as Ms. Warren put it, “You just can’t tell them their score, that they’re an L. You’ve got to tell them why they’re an L, and how you can become an M.” Ms. Warren explained this was “. . . our rationale for piloting. We rolled this out last spring for them to dabble in it for half a year.” This information came to staff in March of 2011 and teachers had access to a series of how-to videos. The teachers were asked to learn the logistics so that come the fall of 2012, there would be intensive follow-up in professional learning opportunities.

In the fall of 2012 the delivery of the professional development changed for this professional learning. It then took place during the district-wide PLC time occurring once per month as grade levels. Grade level teachers across the district met, and the building level literacy coaches provided the professional development. October through December the PLC professional development in literacy lasted 1.5 hours per monthly session. For the remainder of the year, it was 30 minutes per month. The sessions in the first three months was longer because the reading specialists, using the gradual release of responsibility, were working with teachers on knowing and understanding the target levels and behaviors for each level. The step-by-step details of this process are described in *Building Teacher Capacity*. Overall, the first three professional development sessions pulled together: learning from the running record clinic in using data to inform decisions; using *The Continuum of Literacy Learning* (2011) by Fountas and Pinnell to look at behaviors and understandings; analyzing what the student(s) know and are able to do; and then planning prompts to scaffold student learning for a particular level. Following these three 1.5 hour sessions in October through December of 2012, follow-up coaching was done by the building reading specialists.

**Scaffolding teachers' learning -- 10 week coaching.** In the fall of 2012, Dr. Anders directed that for the first 10 weeks of school the sole duty of the building reading specialists would be coaching. When asked about why she made the decision to do 10 weeks of coaching, Dr. Anders explained:

It's reactive or proactive. And that's the only way we're going to change teachers, is to be in and doing that coaching. And they were doing coaching before I got here with teachers who wanted it. And I learned in [a previous district] really quickly, that that doesn't work. It's a great way to start. It's a great way to start because you . . . get to people who want it

and they say positive things about it. But most people don't do it because they think it means they need help. . . [T]hat's partly why we did that 10 weeks of coaching at the beginning of the year, because every teacher needs coaching. It doesn't matter what level you're at. If [Ms. Warren] -- one of my best reading people -- was in the classroom, she'd want coaching, and she's at a pretty high level. And so [we're] giving that message to teachers that every single one of you needs coaching, and so it's not a bad thing. It's a . . . “How can we help you?” And so kind of getting rid of that stigma of having somebody to coach you . . . means you need help.

Given this directive, the Reading Specialists PLC created a 10 week coaching plan. Every teacher received coaching on interactive read aloud, guided reading, shared reading, and independent reading. The coaching, which took place in the building sites, will be discussed in details during each school's chapter.

**Summary.** Ms. Warren led the other reading specialists in developing several professional learning opportunities for staff. All staff participated in the running record clinic -- a way to assess students and gather data. The guided reading professional developments used the data teachers acquired to build their skills in teaching guided reading. To continue developing teachers' skills, a 10 week coaching plan provided professional development in all four components of balanced literacy.

### **Develop Teacher and Administrator Capacity - The District Level Leaders**

This section describes the ways in which the district level leaders built the capacity of the reading specialists, the teachers, and the principals.

**Read, research, reflect -- building reading specialists' capacity.** From early on, the district level leadership has built teacher capacity by creating teams to study and learn together.

When the running record clinic began in 2008, the leadership was growing the capacity of the building reading specialists. In her interview, Ms. Warren stated, “And then my reading specialists also came that first year . . . because you can’t inspect what you expect if you don’t know what it looks like.” This statement ties directly to the philosophy that everything must be followed up with coaching. Ms. Warren needed all of her reading specialists to know exactly what the teachers had learned about running records and what it should look like so they could support it back in the building with fidelity.

All reading specialists received professional development in the area of coaching during the school day. In 2010-2011, Dr. Laub, an instructional coach, came to the Pago School District once a month for six Fridays to meet with all the reading specialists and any interested principals. Three of the reading specialists had already had one course with Dr. Wright, an instructor on coaching.

That entire school year, the members of the Reading Specialist PLC worked on their professional development. Ms. Warren, as the district reading specialist, met with her team every Friday for a half day. In 2011, using this time the reading specialists went through a process to arrive at a common understanding and beliefs about interactive read alouds, shared reading, independent reading, and guided reading. Ms. Warren shared the following: “The format we used was . . . reading specialists have to read, research, and reflect before . . . we can do anything. So we’ll do read, research and reflect, create [professional development], deliver the [professional development], and then follow up with coaching.” Using research, the team read extensively and discussed what they believed to be “true and current and fresh.” The team would reflect on it and determine what it means for their school district and create their absolutes.

Ms. Warren is a strong believer in building capacity of her building reading specialists. During the interview she stated that's why "my Friday afternoons are so critical that if my reading specialists don't get to . . . [read/research, reflect], we won't stay fresh and current." In 2010, when she first started her Friday afternoon sessions with her reading specialists, the Reading Specialists PLC spent time reading and reflecting on the book *When Readers Struggle* by Fountas and Pinnell (2009). She believes that's when she "stretched their brains the deepest." But that is also what she feels she is missing now in building their capacity. *When Readers Struggle* is more for themselves as reading specialists and building their knowledge around how students learn to read, whereas the current research helps prepare them to deliver professional development and support the teachers. Ms. Warren said, "We're always getting ready for the next thing." Ms. Frank, a building reading specialist also saw the Friday afternoon time as her professional development time. She said, "We have our own professional development PLC type of sessions where we were going through *When Readers Struggle* and just building our teacher capacity for understanding that."

**"Inspect what you expect" -- building principal capacity.** Ms. Wulft, Niyoron's principal, shared that Dr. Anders believes principals should be instructional leaders. To support instructional leadership the district level leaders provided principals with professional development in the area of literacy in three ways - - coaching, front loading, and in learning the tools that will assist them in evaluating their schools' literacy programs. This section outlines how the capacity of the principals was supported in these areas.

The running record clinic was designed primarily for teachers and coaches, but the principals attended for the same reason as the reading specialists. The two principals interviewed

for this study attended this professional learning experience. Ms. Warren said they were invited to attend “because you can’t inspect what you expect if you don’t know what it looks like.”

Another way principal’s capacity was developed was in front loading. Dr. Anders shared “Principals come to the same trainings that teachers do, and then we have monthly principal meetings . . . last year [Ms. Warren], came into several of those meetings and she’ll do it again this year because she’ll be talking about writing now. So then we talk about -- we kind of try to front load with the principals so they’re getting that information.” Giving principals their own professional development and then including them in the teacher training, gives them the skills to know what the instruction should look like if delivered with fidelity.

Ms. Warren also provided detail on building the capacity of the principals in the areas focused on during the 10 week coaching plan - - interactive read aloud, shared reading, independent reading, and guided reading. The coaching of principals occurred in real time, that is, it was embedded with the teacher’s coaching time. The principal aligned himself/herself with a classroom for the 10 weeks and was present when the coaching was occurring for that specific classroom.

Team observations also began in the 2012-2013 school year and provided another coaching opportunity to build principal capacity. During a team observation, as instruction occurred, in the back of the room the principal and a “master teacher” or a reading specialist watched the instruction. This was the time the principal received coaching. As Ms. Warren described it:

The whole purpose is [the master teacher or reading specialist and principal are] sitting at the back of the room looking for the stellar moments to celebrate . . . When I’m with the

principal then I say, “Okay, she’s doing this because in this moment an interactive read aloud you have to do this or the turn and talk moment, why’d she choose this”? So I’m . . . essentially coaching the principal at the same time and saying why is this happening.

After the team observation the principal led a feedback conversation with the classroom teacher. The “master teacher” or reading specialist sat alongside the classroom teacher to co-represent what happened. Principals hear from the classroom teacher and the reading specialist or master teacher the reasons behind the instructional decisions. This gives principals another opportunity to improve their ability to hear specifically what makes it a good or great lesson and builds their capacity to “inspect what they expect.”

At the district level, principals received one more piece of professional development. The strategic action plan identified building administrator capacity. In the 2011-2012 school year the action step was to “Train administrators to use the evaluation system to improve their own instructional leadership, thus better supporting teacher growth.” The update reflected that the training accomplished using iObservation occurred in the 2011 school year and continued into the 2012-2013 school year.

**Gradual release of responsibility -- developing teacher capacity.** The opportunities for building teacher capacity by receiving professional development from the district level have been explicitly laid out in the preceding sections. Ms. Warren’s philosophy around building capacity is clear:

When I'm working with the [teachers], if I don't teach in a gradual release of responsibility way then they won't. And so I'm trying to show them that . . . gradual

release of responsibility could happen all within 30 minutes. I can do a model, and a shared experience, and guide it, and now you're independent. Or it could happen over a course of the semester.

Beginning in 2008, teachers attended the running record clinic. Ms. Warren stated that, "Let's say I have anywhere between 20-26. That is kind of my limit for running record training because I need to be right there with them." This statement reflects a commitment to being present with teachers, not just delivering content and the "how to" surrounding the running record.

The importance of learning it a certain way and following it with fidelity was shared with teachers by Ms. Warren. "How do you do [a running record] with fidelity according to [Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System] because I've talked to them about we have to do it how Fountas and Pinnell has prescribed it. You may have had your own experience with running records but this is how we're going to do it because we are not just communicating with our colleagues in [Pago], we're communicating with colleagues across the country. It's like the Verizon map, it's taking over the country. It really has." During Ms. Preen's interview she, too, referenced working with colleagues to build an understanding about conducting running records. In a discussion about marking a running record and asking the comprehension questions she said, "I know across the district, its kind of subjective when you ask those comprehension questions. What I think might be a three, someone else might think is a two. So we kind of had this discussion about what would get full credit for some questions or what might not." In this way, the teachers built a collective understanding of scoring.

In October of 2012 the teachers examined the Fountas and Pinnell charts to arrive at reasonable expectations for where their students should be at in a given point of time in the

school year. Ms. Warren recounted regarding how they “talked about how we look at text . . . You have to know what a text demands of the reader. So took them back to the guided reading training.” Using Fountas and Pinnells *The Continuum of Literacy Learning* (2011) the teachers recorded their name, the date, and the level they were focusing on. Because the teachers were working in their district-level PLC, the reading specialists followed a similar PLC format. The form asked them first to identify “What do readers have to be able to do to read at this level with understanding and accuracy? Try to use verbs to describe reader’s actions . . . They had to go through and find the verbs to describe what are they going to have to be able to do.” This information was recorded in a column.

In the next column, was for evidence of reading behavior asking, “What are they able to do during the running record conversation?” This pulled the teacher back to reflect on his/her student data. Teachers used highlighters to mark all the things their student(s) were able to do. This process helped teachers to determine “What do they still need?”

The final step involved recognizing “new and remarkable behaviors.” Using the prompting resource from the *Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI)* by Fountas and Pinnell, teachers used the prompting guide and the evidence they had written about their students to pick a prompt or two that would reinforce the new and remarkable behaviors. Teachers wrote this down and practiced saying it.

Ms. Warren recognized “not everybody is going to be proficient at all of these. But you only practice with two or three a month, get really good at those. Now the next month and the next level we’re going to add another two or three.” This process was repeated all three months, allowing teachers to delve into the current levels of their students to understand the behaviors for that level, to ensure teachers are aware of the understandings of the students at that level, and to

develop prompts for new and remarkable behaviors. Ms. Warren summarized it as “I’m trying to gradually develop their capacity to know when to use prompts.”

As previously described, the team observations began in the 2012-2013 school year. The reading specialist or “master teacher” coached the principal while the teacher instructed. Following the lesson, however, the reading specialist or “master teacher” coached the teacher. In essence, what the person coaching is trying to do is help the teacher reflect and understand the reasons behind the instructional decisions she has made. Ms. Warren described coaching the feedback conversation with a sports analogy:

Essentially the reading specialist or the master teacher comes alongside the teacher to co-represent the instruction that happened. Not as a defense but . . . [to] help her understand why you did this at this moment . . . [T]he analogy that I get is when I go to a football game and my boys and my son are watching a football game and they say, “Oh, that was an amazing tackle.” They didn’t give you the criteria that makes it an amazing tackle. I just say, “Oh, they tackle.”

Ms. Warren described it as “Can she sell it? Does she know those moments that she wants to say, this is why I did this and this is - - because it forces her to reflect.”

**Summary.** The district level leaders focused on building the capacity of the principals, reading specialists, and teachers. Reading specialists built their capacity in best practices in literacy and also in coaching strategies. The principals participated in professional development designed to fine tune their ability to observe and determine if strategies are implemented as intended. Lastly, the reading specialists delivered professional development using a gradual release of responsibility model tailored to the teachers’ needs.

## **Foster Relationships and Collaboration - The District Level Leaders**

This section describes the ways district leaders built time for collaboration and fostered relationships with reading specialists, principals, and teachers.

**Key people -- Dr. Anders and Ms. Warren.** Upon meeting Dr. Anders and Ms. Warren it is clear that they enjoy a strong and productive relationship and they are given their own category here because of the significance of their relationship. Dr. Anders relies heavily on Ms. Warren. When asked if there is anything else she wanted me to know about professional development in the district, Dr. Anders said:

Probably for reading especially, having [Ms. Warren], and you'll know when you've talked to her that she's a key person for me. Because . . . she's one of those people who's constantly learning more and more and more about reading. And she's also really good at what she does . . . It's really key for her to lead that with the reading specialists, and then the reading specialists go back and lead it in the buildings.

Ms. Warren expressed sentiments regarding a high degree of satisfaction working with Ms. Anders.

**DuFour's four questions for collaboration at the district level PLCs.** The district has half a day of professional development time each month when grade level teachers from across the district meet and have time to collaborate on various topics using DuFour's four questions of:

1. What is it we want our students to learn? . . .
2. How will we know if our students are learning? . . .
3. How will our team and our school respond when students don't learn? . . .
4. How will we enrich and extend the learning for students who have demonstrated proficiency? (DuFour, 2008)

From October 2012 to December 2012, an hour and a half was focused on literacy. The remainder of the year, the time allotted toward literacy was thirty minutes. The collaboration and professional learning was expected to follow through at the building level. (In each case study, this is explored in greater detail.) Dr. Anders described the professional development as “the district time is just to kind of bring them all together, but the PLC time in their buildings is more for just follow-up on those things.” During those district-wide sessions, all staff were able to hear the same information and to receive the professional development at the same time. (What happened in the building levels is explored in each individual case.)

**Learning together as a reading specialist PLC.** As previously discussed, the reading specialists met for half a day each week for professional development. This allowed for the building reading specialists to have professional development tailored for their needs in learning to coach, keep current on research, reflect together, and develop professional development for the staff. This shift from intervention to coaching requires expertise in not only content knowledge but in coaching others. Dr. Anders recognized the importance of the building reading specialists. As the model moved from interventions to coaching, she shared, “It's a big shift. It's a really big shift. Because it's -- it makes us more consistent. And we're a big district, and so we really have to be consistent like that. And they're the leaders, I mean they're the literacy leaders in their building.” This dedication of time and a focus on the reading specialists/coaches that allowed this group to function as its own PLC.

**Keeping in contact -- the district level leaders and principals.** District level leaders foster relationships with the principals. In the interview with Dr. Anders, she indicated that she tries to meet with the principals for 30 minutes per month. During the monthly principal meetings, the district level data person shares data and communicates about progress toward

goals. Dr. Anders shared “we also have our data person bring data to our principal meetings. And we send out data reports . . . not always as often as we want to, but our principals are really good at . . . when that MAP data comes out, they look at it and they use it. They're really good about that, every single one of our principals.” The data person also fosters collaboration with the principals by sharing data when available.

**Peers -- Ms. Warren and teachers.** Based on the interview, the district level leaders seemed to have little direct day-to-day contact with teachers in fostering and building collaborative teams. Collaboration was fostered through the dedication of professional development time focused on PLCs, but it was not necessarily as a result of direct contact with district level leaders.

Throughout the interviews especially with Ms. Warren, there was evidence that relationships were important. One of her comments regarding the running record clinic showed she sees herself as an equal -- as a peer. In talking about side-by-side coaching, she said it “really builds a lot of confidence in that teacher. To say, ‘Oh, I am doing it just like she’s doing it.’ You know? And it just kind of shows that yeah, it’s not rocket science. It’s just practice is really what it is.” Ms. Warren seemed to want to demystify the process of doing running records and show that the reading specialists and the classroom teachers were doing things more alike than different.

Another instance where she showed she understands what the teachers are going through was when talking about doing the Benchmark Assessment System with fidelity.

I’ve talked to them about we have to do it how Fountas and Pinnell has prescribed it. You may have had your own experience with running records but this is how we’re going to do it because we are not just communicating with our colleagues in [Pago], we’re

communicating with colleagues across the country. It's like the Verizon map, it's taking over the country.

Lastly, Ms. Warren displayed that she understands what the teachers are experiencing by sharing that when she does the Benchmark Assessment, she too was doing it in a new way. She said in our interview "So I said I too -- I trained under Marie Clay's way, had to give up some things, a way I used to do it."

While there are few examples of how district level leaders foster relationships examples for relationships and collaboration are not as deep as other groups, it is still important to note that Ms. Warren connects through sharing of her experiences that are similar to what the other teachers are feeling too. It is also noteworthy that while relationships and collaboration with teachers was not directly addressed by Dr. Anders, it is clear that the commitment to provide teachers with the time to collaborate is spelled out quite clearly for the district level as half a day a month and at the building level as twice per week.

**Summary.** The assistant superintendent, Ms. Anders, and the district reading specialist, Ms. Warren collaborated and developed relationships with staff. The assistant superintendent met regularly with her principals and Ms. Warren. Ms. Anders described her as a key person for her and she relied on her. Ms. Warren had a unique role in PLCs. She facilitated the Reading Specialist PLC in learning about best practices and then creating professional development for the district and their school. The Reading Specialist PLC facilitated the professional development at the district level PLCs using DuFour's four guiding questions. Lastly, although Ms. Warren led other teachers, she conveyed to staff her role as a teacher and peer.

**Summary**

This chapter using the district's strategic plan, interviews with district leaders, and district literacy documents created a picture of professional development for literacy in the Pago School District. The chapter shares -- from the district perspective -- what the leaders are doing to provide highly effective professional development using the four overarching themes of leading and staying the course, sustaining coherent and differentiated professional learning, building capacity, and fostering relationships and collaboration. Although this chapter is not a "case" to be studied, it is inextricably tied to the two case study sites that follow. Both school sites have been a part of what is happening at the district level and both school sites have access to the same district level leaders. As each case is described, it draws upon and interacts with what is happening at the district level. For each case study, what is happening at the school site will be explored in-depth, and the discussion of each site will draw upon what has been described in this chapter.

## **Chapter V: Niyoron Elementary School**

*(Niyoron -- Chamorro for Cordia, a blossoming tree with orange flowers)*

In this chapter I present the case of Niyoron Elementary School. I begin with a description of the demographics of Niyoron Elementary School and provide additional WKCE-CRT and school achievement data. Next, I describe the building level leaders who were interviewed. Lastly, I explore what is happening in professional development through the overarching themes of:

- Leading and staying the course;
- Sustaining coherent and differentiated professional learning opportunities;
- Developing teacher and administrator capacity;
- Fostering relationships and collaboration.

### **School Context**

In 2011-2012 Niyoron Elementary School was a kindergarten through third grade school serving about 350 students. Prior to that time it was a kindergarten through fifth grade school serving anywhere between 250-300 students. Since 2001, students identified as economically disadvantaged ranged from 58.3% (2001) to 76.3% (2010). In 2011-2012, Niyoron Elementary demographics were 43% white, 30.4% Hispanic, 16.7% African American, 6% two or more races, 1.8% Asian, and American Indian and Pacific Islander made up the remainder 2.1%. To contrast that to 10 years prior, the demographics in 2001-2002 were 54% white, 23.7% African American, 19.1% Hispanic, 2.9% Asian, 2.9% and .4% American Indian. Throughout the 10 year span, there have been fluctuations in those identified as African American, white, and Hispanic.

In 2011, 13.3% of the students were English Language Learners. Of the students who were ELL, nearly 85% had Spanish as their first language. Over the past 10 years the range of English Language Learners has been as high as 28.4% (2009) to and as low as 13.3% (2011). In every year, Spanish has been the highest percentage of ELLs.

Achievement data provides a look into the school's past performance. Longitudinal WKCE-CRT data, while not included in criteria for participation in the study, provides information regarding the past and current performance of the sites. Information from testing dates in the fall of 2009 and 2010 is summarized below.

Table 3

*Percentage of Students Identified as Economically Disadvantaged (School and State)*

Niyoron Elementary (Pseudonym)	School Percentage of Students Identified as Economically Disadvantaged	State Percentage of Students Identified as Economically Disadvantaged
2010-2011	76.3%	43.2%
2009-2010	72.3%	40.9%

Niyoron Elementary exceeds the threshold of 50% identified as economically disadvantaged for both years.

Table 4

*Percentage of Economically Disadvantaged and Reading Achievement on WKCE-CRT*

Niyoron Elementary (Pseudonym)	Grade Tested	School % Proficient & Advanced of Economically Disadvantaged	State % Proficient & Advanced of Economically Disadvantaged
2010	3rd	46.4%	68.6%
2009	3rd	55.5%	66.5%

For these two years, the Niyoron Elementary students identified as economically disadvantaged did not outperform the state percentage on the WKCE-CRT. It is interesting to note that if the criteria had been for three years, Niyoron Elementary would not have met the criteria of this study.

In 2010-2011, Niyoron Elementary School met adequate yearly progress on all measures under No Child Left Behind. In 2011-2012 school year, the State of Wisconsin began creating report cards with a rating scale of the following: Significantly Exceeds Expectations, Exceeds Expectations, Meets Expectations, Meets Few Expectations, and Fails to Meet Expectations. Niyoron Elementary received a “Meets Expectations” rating for the 2011-2012 school year.

### **Niyoron Elementary Building Level Leaders**

**Principal Wulft.** Principal Wulft has been in the Pago School District for sixteen years. Prior to becoming a principal she taught as an elementary level teacher, an early childhood special education teacher, and she worked one year in curriculum. Ms. Wulft moved from another elementary school principalship in the fall of 2011 to become the principal of Niyoron Elementary. During her tenure at the previous school, it received the National Blue Ribbon honor

for achievement, specifically in the areas of reading and math. This national recognition is for dramatic improvement and high performance in schools with at least 40% of students identified as economically disadvantaged. During her tenure, the school also received a Wisconsin School of Promise award from 2007-2011. To qualify for this the school met the following benchmarks:

- Title I school;
- In the top quartile of the state for the percentage of students receiving free/reduced lunch;
- Above-average student academic performance on WKCE-CRT test scores (Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam) in reading and mathematics when compared to similar schools; and
- Met AYP (adequate yearly progress) indicators for two or more consecutive years.

([http://rewards.dpi.wi.gov/rewards\\_home](http://rewards.dpi.wi.gov/rewards_home))

**Colleen Solt, Niyoron reading specialist.** Ms. Solt began with the Pago School District in 1996. The district hired her as a special education teacher, but she later obtained her regular education license and her reading specialist license. Before accepting the reading specialist position, Ms. Solt taught first through third grades. She has been a reading specialist for three years. Ms. Solt was the reading specialist in Ms. Wulft's previous school and when Ms. Wulft was transferred to Niyoron Elementary, Ms. Solt was reassigned to Niyoron Elementary, too. Ms. Solt leads by keeping students in the center and examining best practice. When asked about professional development and how she does it she said:

It's . . . consistency and always keeping the kids in mind. What do they need? What is best practice? The newest thing is of course is going to be the common core . . . how is that going to play into your teaching?

Ms. Solt fit the criteria of being a teacher leader in her role as a reading specialist. This chapter will outline her contributions, including her work with the PLCs and coaching, through the lens of the four themes.

**Mary Preen, kindergarten teacher at Niyoron Elementary.** Ms. Preen has been a kindergarten teacher at Niyoron Elementary her entire career spanning the past nine years. The first seven years she had her own self-contained classroom with 15 students, and some of those years she worked with students with disabilities. During that time, she also collaborated with a special education teacher and she worked with a paraprofessional. For the last two years she has team taught with one other regular education teacher in a classroom of thirty students. Working in a teaming situation, Ms. Preen and her co-teacher did not keep specific class lists. Instead, they heard each student read every day, and all students worked with a teacher in math every day.

Ms. Preen fit the criteria of being a teacher leader in literacy as an informal leader. She readily took on new instructional practices, learned about them, tried them out, and then shared them with her colleagues. This chapter shares her contribution to providing professional development as it relates to the four themes.

### **Providing Effective Professional Development at Niyoron Elementary**

The remainder of this chapter describes professional development opportunities at Niyoron Elementary School by looking at the ways these staff members led at Niyoron Elementary, sustained coherent differentiated professional learning, fostered relationships and collaboration, and built capacity.

### **Leading and Staying the Course at Niyoron Elementary**

This section describes the ways Ms. Wulft, Ms. Solt, and Ms. Preen led at Niyoron Elementary. Each of them have a different role at Niyoron Elementary yet, each found a way to lead at their school.

**Unwavering message and follow through.** Ms. Wulft has led Niyoron Elementary and stayed the course by following the district's expectations and by giving staff clear direction and feedback. When Ms. Wulft moved to Niyoron Elementary, the data were not reflecting high achievement by all students. She shared the perspective that people look for leadership and find it whether it is a formal or informal leader.

You know what happens if you don't have someone that is kind of keeping eyes on [following through on professional development at the school] and . . . forcing it and making sure people are doing it. Then out of the ranks come teachers who will just start making decisions and then they take on that leadership role. So that then they were doing what they thought was best and they were bringing everybody else along with them.

Ms. Wulft is a self-described rule follower and came to Niyoron Elementary with the message of, "No, this is what the district says we are supposed to be doing," which has caused some friction during her transition and start at Niyoron Elementary. As a leader, Ms. Wulft recognized "That is human nature. If no one is organizing and someone is going to step up and do that and whether its right or wrong, that's just people. Most people want some kind of structure." Ms. Wulft has worked to provide that structure by following the district's mandates.

In her first year as principal at Niyoron Elementary, she noticed that one grade level in particular had data with many students scoring below the benchmarks. Ms. Wulft looked toward the district level leadership to guide her response.

I called [Dr. Anders] and said, “Okay, we have to come up with a plan.” I said, “Because obviously I don’t have enough people to do interventions to get all these kids to grade level.” So you know, that is when we started [coaching the universal]. You know the only way we are ever going to get everyone to grade level is to be focusing on our universal instruction.

Dr. Anders, in her interview recalled, “She got that [particular] grade team together, and she brought in the curriculum people, the reading people, and said, ‘What are we going to do?’” Ms. Wulft saw that the data were not where they needed to be. She sought out district leadership and led the district in helping to create a major initiative, the 10 week coaching model that was later implemented district-wide in the fall of 2012. Details of the district-wide coaching plan are described in Chapter Four and also as part of this case study in sustaining professional learning.

Another way in which Ms. Wulft leads Niyoron Elementary is by providing consistent, clear feedback to staff regarding her observations in the classroom. In the spring of 2011, Ms. Wulft foreshadowed the district’s implementation of the iObservation tool:

In the spring I told them I want them to think of over the summer what would you really like to work on next year. And so then I asked everybody to go in and set up . . . individual education goals . . . in the system. I said I’d like them to have at least one that is literacy based . . . I had everybody do professional goals this year, even if they were not on cycle.

By having the teachers put some thought into their goals, one of which must be literacy, Ms. Wulft was ready in the fall to continue leading in the area of literacy.

With the implementation of iObservation, the superintendent expected the principals to conduct twenty walk-throughs on each teacher. With this expectation from the district level, combined with Ms. Wulft's expectation that teachers create goals, Ms. Wulft set her own goal:

So that is my goal -- even though they are not on cycle I told everybody I want to do at least one formal [observation] this year, and then I would do a summative at the end with all their iObservations and their formative, and we'd look at their individual plan that they came up with -- their goals -- and to see whether they felt like they met their goals or if they needed to work on their goals more.

With teachers having developed their goals, with the expectation of 20 walk throughs, and Ms. Wulft setting her goals on conducting evaluations on every teacher, Ms. Wulft led by tailoring the walkthrough feedback directly to their goals.

When I go in . . . if they said they wanted to work on guided reading then I try to make sure to do a lot their walk throughs and even their formative assessment if they are on cycle, I try to look at the things they are working on to make sure.

During the 2012-2013 school year, Ms. Wulft continued to lead by providing the feedback to teachers. Here is how she described how she aligned the schedules to ensure she could give them feedback in literacy:

The main thing I'm focusing on this year is the mini-lessons and their guided reading lessons. . . I did their schedule for them. . . [A]ll my 2nd grade has literacy at the same time so then I know that during this chunk of time, if I walk in I should be able to see a mini lesson or a guided reading lesson. And I'm not the best with walk throughs because it is hard for me to walk in just for 5 minutes. I mean most of the time I end up staying 15

or 20 minutes because I need to see how they transition between the mini lesson and how they start the guided reading.

Team observations, as described earlier in Chapter Four, started at Niyoron Elementary in the fall of 2012. Ms. Wulft said, “This year [the superintendent] is having us do these team observations where you take a team of people in . . . If teachers want to come with me to watch another teacher, sometimes it ends up being myself, the reading specialist, and . . . we put it out there and it is on google docs and people from other buildings come.” Ms. Wulft shared that every teacher was to have a team observation sometime during the 2012-2013 school year.

Lastly, Ms. Wulft has led by following through with her reluctant staff on PLCs. In the strategic plan, the action step was two PLC meetings per week at each grade level. Ms. Wulft said, “That has been a bone of contention for some of them . . . [T]hey don’t want him to have those two PLCs a week but that was kind of mandated by the superintendent, and I think it has helped to build some of the teams.”

Ms. Wulft, over the past two years, has led her staff to follow the direction of the district level, something that in the past had not always occurred. This was evidenced in the walk throughs, team observations, professional goals, and the PLCs at the building level. However, Ms. Wulft has also sought out district level support when she saw that there were students not meeting benchmarks. The later sections in this chapter detail how Ms. Wulft provided the professional development during the day and after the school day.

**Colleagues leading colleagues.** Two teachers, Ms. Solt and Ms. Preen have different positions at Niyoron Elementary, but each is leading and helping the school stay on the course of

improvement in literacy. This section briefly describes in what ways these two teachers are leading.

Ms. Solt, as the reading specialist, has two primary duties -- being an interventionist and coaching. She is assisting her school on achieving its goals through the ongoing coaching, the 10 week coaching, and PLCs. As a coach, Ms. Solt was part of the Reading Specialists PLC and she worked with her PLC group to be ready to lead back at the building level. In her interview she shared:

We'd meet [at the Reading Specialist PLC meetings] and we'd look at the whole picture.

What does the district need as a whole? And so then we as a group would decide, "Okay, we need to really look at balanced literacy" and see what all of our teachers need to make sure it is consistent across the entire district. So that we're all delivering the same message.

Like Ms. Wulft, Ms. Solt led by bringing back the district expectation around literacy practices, and by delivering the district-wide message as intended.

Ms. Wulft also recognized the leadership Ms. Solt provided at the building level. In her interview she said, "If there are certain things like this, what do we need to do with the coaching? Who needs help with this? [The Reading Specialist PLC] get[s] together on Friday afternoons and [the building reading specialists] come back out and work with the staff."

At Niyoron Elementary, Ms. Solt led during the grade level PLCs by facilitating discussions, reminding about upcoming dates, and looking at student data. She shared:

I attend all the weekly reading meetings and those are grade group wise also. So when kindergarten has theirs, I'm at their reading one. So, we designate one day to reading.

And for awhile it was to go over the different articles and “Do you have any questions?” or . . . now its “What kids are you having concerns about? What do you need me to do for you?” . . . Just kind of reminding them about the deadlines, things that need to be done so that we are all on the same page and hearing the same message.

Ms. Solt has led at her school through consistency, by ensuring that everyone had the same expectations, and by supporting teachers as they identified needs.

Ms. Preen, as a kindergarten teacher, has led in a different, yet important way. She is a person who does not wait to be asked to try things, and she volunteered to be part of a pilot literacy writing project. It required that she attend a two day summer training and then implement the pieces throughout the year. There was no commitment to train others. However, through her enthusiasm and excitement about what she observed with her students, she shared her learning with her grade level PLC. During her interview, when asked about professional development, she shared the following about teachers working with teachers:

[T]hey are your own colleagues . . . they’ve tried it, and . . . you really hope that they’ll buy into it because I’ve done that . . . especially with the writing. It was like, “Okay, I’ll try that out,” and now I’m so excited about it and I want to share that passion . . .

Sometimes that is better than somebody you don’t know coming in from the outside just giving it to you and saying, “Here, go try this” . . . To see people excited, and not that those people aren’t excited either, but, those are your colleagues that have fought in the trenches to do something and . . . really bring something out of it.

Ms. Preen used her grade level PLC time as one way to share what she has learned from implementing the writing with her fellow teachers. When asked about opportunities to share with her kindergarten teammates, she said:

Some of that falls during our . . . half hour PLCs time to just . . . tell them what we're doing because [the other teachers] haven't really done the writing so I'm really trying to . . . give them some materials, and the writing committee came up with a whole packet of materials to help people implement it and . . . get going on it at least a little bit this year so that when [we] have to do it next year, they'll have a little bit of experience with it so they can come back and say, "Yes, this is working, [or] no it's not," and I've been there, so I know.

Ms. Preen is an example of an informal teacher leader who stepped up to try something new and found that her excitement over what she saw made her want to share it with others. Ms. Solt recognized this type teacher as one who would help the school accomplish its goals. In her interview Ms. Solt reflected on what she thought would foster getting the practices into place:

The cheerleaders of the group. The ones that are doing it and know that it is working and say, "Hey, this is really working. I'm doing this in my room." They really have the voice and if you can get them on your good side, just a few of them, then other people will start to come along . . . because the data is going to show that things are better. And then they're going to go, "Hmm, I wonder what they're doing that I'm not doing."

At Niyoron Elementary informal leaders and cheerleaders implemented what they learned, watched students grow, and shared their practice with others, ultimately leading to students learning at high levels. Ms. Preen is one example of a teacher who assumed a leadership role.

**Summary.** At Niyoron Elementary, Ms. Wulft led by following through on district expectations. When she saw an area of need such as students not performing, she did something about it, she consulted district leaders and developed a plan. Ms. Wulft also provided feedback to staff through walk throughs and team observations aligned to teachers' goals. Ms. Solt led in her coaching role. As she met and developed plans with her reading specialist colleagues she led by following through with the professional development in the building. Ms. Preen led in an informal role by sharing her learning and what she tried in the classroom with her colleagues with the hopes of inspiring them to, as in her words, "buy into it."

### **Sustain Coherent, Differentiated Learning Opportunities at Niyoron Elementary**

This section details what occurred at Niyoron Elementary to sustain professional development and to build coherence in literacy practices, and how it was differentiated for the staff. It should be noted that elements of other themes such as building capacity or relationships also appear in this section. Those themes do not always fit in neat and tidy compartments and naturally are interwoven with this theme. Because of that, like Chapter Four, *Sustain Coherent, Differentiated Learning Opportunities*, this section paints a detailed picture of the professional learning opportunities and in the themes that follow, the specific elements of each are teased apart.

**Collectively figuring it out -- grade level PLCs.** This section explores how PLCs at the building level sustained professional development that began at the district level. Follow through from the district level supported the development of a coherent set of experiences and was accomplished through weekly PLC meetings, and monthly PLC release times focusing on student data and decision making.

Niyoron Elementary used PLCs to sustain professional learning experiences. With the district strategic plan calling for two building PLCs per week, the PLCs were structured to sustain professional learning, not only in literacy but also in math. For the purposes of this case study, the discussion will be limited to how PLCs support professional development in the area of literacy.

Following a district-wide PLC, Ms. Wulft was strategic in how she used the next building PLC time:

Normally what I do is if we have a district PLC, this year it has been on Friday, and so then our building PLC will be on Monday so then we can take a few minutes to debrief about what they did learn if they had [professional development], talk about what it would look like in their classroom, and then we usually look at the data.

At the district-wide PLC, anywhere between 30 to 90 minutes were spent on literacy professional development. Ms. Wulft then pulled what was started at the district level into her school and was able to follow through in sustaining it in her building.

Another way professional learning occurred during grade level PLCs was by asking staff to front load for the upcoming staff meeting PLC. Ms. Solt said:

All staff come together in one classroom and that is where we have our staff meeting. But they were expected to view the videos in their grade groups at some point, either during the PLC times or at some other time they were supposed to view them together as a group. So it was up to them to do it and have it done ahead of time so that they could discuss it at the staff meeting.

This request to read or view something ahead of time was structured to be a collective activity, not an individual activity.

During the 10 week coaching, once a week the grade level PLC time focused on preparing for a coaching session. Ms. Solt attended these meetings, and she developed the focus of the meeting. Ms. Preen said, “[The reading specialists] gave us an article to read about either interactive read aloud or . . . whatever topic they were going to be looking for, and we would discuss that in our professional learning community with [Ms. Solt]. And then we’d have some reading to do on our own and then she’d come in and model.

Each month Ms. Wulft used building funds to hire substitutes, allowing teachers to be relieved of their classroom responsibilities to work together as a grade level PLC at meetings attended by grade level teachers, the ESL teacher, special education teacher, reading specialist, and Ms. Wulft. Ms. Wulft shared the following:

And then once a month, I use usually title money, whatever I can find. I get subs and so then . . . we can rotate through the building and have a couple hours for each grade level to get together and ...we really dive into the data and we look at what we’ve done.

During these PLCs data was looked at closely. A visual display, a data board, was used to look at the progress of all students and then to make decisions. For these PLCs, Ms. Wulft created the agenda and teachers were responsible for bringing their data. Ms Solt said the time was spent in the following manner:

They have to look at [BAS and MAP data] and see if there is a correlation here. Do you have Johnny here who is falling out on the BAS but is scoring really high on the MAP? What is going on with Johnny? Or vice versa. They have to take a good look at their data

and then we arrange, we look at our intervention groups at that time, too, to see if we are hitting all of the students and they are all getting some type of intervention. Whether that be for the gifted and talented people or those that are struggling. They have to hit all students.

Structuring the PLC time in this way is a form of professional learning, as it requires all members to collectively discuss how to meet the needs of all their grade level learners. Ms. Wulft described the monthly PLC time as:

We'll spend the time looking at the data, deciding if we are going to do any intervention groups, who goes into those groups, who is going to work with those groups, do we need any enrichment groups, who needs to . . . have some enrichment activities.

Outside the PLC time, there were intervention bands when teachers share students based on what the teachers decided their student needs were.

**Using staff meetings to become a PLC.** Staff meetings were designed to focus on professional learning. The contract stipulated that Ms. Wulft could have one staff meeting per month that could go 50 minutes longer than the regularly contracted time, meaning a staff meetings could go until 4:15. She structured those meetings to function like a professional learning community. At the time of the interview, the school was doing a book study on *Good to Great Teaching*. Ms. Solt shared a little bit on how Ms. Wulft structured one of the staff meeting PLC times. “[Ms. Wulft] will assign a chapter. Last time she asked them to pick one person from their grade group to be video taped and then evaluate using the grid from *Good to Great* on what’s good, what’s great, and what should probably go good-bye.” In the 2011 school year, the

book study was on PLCs. Ms. Wulft said, “ I try to make sure that my staff meetings are more of a professional learning community and do some PD.”

**Teaching with fidelity through the 10 week coaching.** For all K-3 teachers, Ms. Wulft said, “[Dr. Anders’s] plan [is] that every year we will have 10 weeks of coaching.” Ms. Solt shared two goals of the 10 week coaching model. She said, “The [first] goal was for teachers to really understand . . . balanced literacy, what the components were and also so they would implement it with fidelity.” Ms. Solt identified the second goal as, “no pull out, also so [the classroom teachers] would get to know their students.”

In the 2011-2012 school year, Ms. Solt worked with another building reading specialist and Ms. Warren to pilot a 10 week coaching model for kindergarten and first grade teachers at Niyoron Elementary. This pilot eventually evolved into the 10 week coaching plan that went district-wide in the fall of 2012.

Following the discussion about the articles in the grade level PLC time, the coaching began in the classrooms using gradual release of responsibility. Ms. Preen shared one of her experiences with preparing for the coaching:

The interactive read aloud really sticks out because that is not something we’d always done in our rooms. We would have to make the lesson plan up and show it to her and . . . really focus on those specific areas with that for that amount of time.

Ms. Solt described the actual coaching:

I would model and then if they wanted me, I know my teachers well enough to know if they want me to sit side-by-side with them and do a lesson together most of them said,

“No, I can do it.” So I would usually model two and they would do two. . . [B]ecause they could figure it out after modeling.

When the classroom teacher taught, Ms. Solt provided feedback. “They’d do a lesson for me, or they would model one, or implement it, however you want to say that. When they’d do a lesson and I’d give them some feedback right away. On what I saw and how it went.” Ms. Preen also added that the feedback included “comments on areas we did well on or things to talk to her about and improve on in each area.” This coaching model was followed for the four components: interactive read aloud, shared reading, independent reading, and guided reading. Going forward, Ms. Wulft recognized that more differentiation would need to occur because some teachers will get it and others needed to go through the training again.

**Whenever it’s needed -- ongoing coaching.** Coaching at the school site involved the building reading specialists working with Ms. Warren in their Reading Specialist PLC to develop plans on how to build capacity of the teachers in their building. They created and delivered professional development and then supported teachers back at the school site. Ongoing coaching has evolved in recent years. Ms. Solt became a reading specialist in 2010-2011 school year. At that time, she said, she was mostly an interventionist and a resource. Her position has since evolved to be about 50% interventionist and 50% coach. Dr. Anders’s vision is for reading specialists to eventually be 80% coaching and 20% interventionist. Ms. Solt’s perspective was aligned with Dr. Anders’s view regarding coaching. Ms. Solt said, “Initially it was going to be the coaching was going to be more of a voluntary, do you want somebody in here? But that doesn’t always work because those that need the coaching don’t always know they need to ask for the coaching. Or don’t recognize that they could use the help.”

Ms. Solt believes she needs to differentiate the coaching for teachers. She said, “You have to know what they need because not all of them need the same thing and that is what makes it difficult.” As she has coached teachers, she has found success. When asked about what is most rewarding, she responded:

I think when they actually take what I’ve told them and put it in practice, and you walk in and you see it being done. Because then you understand, “Oh they got it, they really get it.” And they’re doing it, and it is making a difference in their classroom, and their kids are actually learning better. So that is the most rewarding thing is . . . -- to actually see it put into practice. You know, you hear people say, “Yeah, that works, it really is a good idea.”

Ms. Wulft indicated that the coaching has not always been well received. “That is another big issue in this building is they’re used to everything pull out and I’m trying to push it in, the more coaching side-by-side stuff.” She shared a reason as to why she feels strongly that ongoing coaching may be a solution.

I keep saying to them, the coaching should be a resource to you. That is part of the purpose because we will never ever have enough interventionist to get everybody to 80%. No way. So you’re going to have to look at what you’re doing, and you’re going to have to set that as your goal. I have to get my kids to 80%.

During the interviews, the participants shared specific instances of when coaching was used at Niyoron Elementary. Ms. Preen shared that following the running record clinic, Ms. Solt was available for coaching and that in general “we’ve been having coaching from our building

reading specialist on the different aspects of balanced literacy. And just kind of any follow up that we need, any direction or any help.”

Having a coaching session was not always initiated by the classroom teacher. Ms. Wulft shared the following situation:

We got our MAP data back, and we had done our winter BAS data [because] we use the BAS that are from Fountas and Pinnell. My concern was that when these kids came into [a particular] grade we only had 12% of our kids that were not proficient at that point . . . Well, then when we looked at it again in January we had like between 60-70% of our kids depending on which class that were not proficient now. My concern is what is happening in [a particular] grade that we're obviously creating remedial readers all of a sudden?

Ms. Wulft's response to this situation was to reallocate the reading specialist time to be directly in the classrooms coaching that grade level:

That was another strategy a couple weeks ago when we looked at our data and I still have [Ms. Solt] freed up for half a day to do coaching. So she does interventions half the day and then she is still available to do coaching. So then, because [a particular] grade was struggling, . . . I said . . . [W]e are going to free up an hour and half a day that she is going to be down there and you . . . can ask for her to come in certain times, or otherwise I'm just going to have her come in at certain times.

The line between the 10 week coaching and ongoing coaching and monthly PLCs blurs. During the interview with Ms. Preen, the 10 week coaching was discussed and when asked about how professional development continued, Ms. Preen responded:

She's always available to us. I go to her a lot if I have a question about anything. She works hard to . . . do her intervention groups and do what she needs to, as well as help out. If we have questions, we can email her and she'll follow up, or we also meet once a month as a building PLC with the kindergarten staff. So the principal is there, the kindergarten staff is there, and then the reading specialist, a special ed teacher, and the ESL teacher. So then we can talk further about some of those things.

At Niyoron Elementary, currently about 50% of Ms. Solt's time is spent coaching. The teachers can ask for materials, assistance, coaching or whatever their specific needs may be. However, when Ms. Wulft saw an area of concern, it no longer was voluntary; Ms. Wulft assigned the coach to the grade where the data reflected students not achieving adequate progress toward learning targets.

**Summary.** The focus of professional development was decided at the district level, and the building level then became responsible for following through in supporting the teachers. At Niyoron Elementary, the systems in place that allowed this to happen included the weekly grade level PLC meeting, the monthly release time PLC meeting, extended time staff meetings, 10 week coaching, and ongoing coaching. Each of these were designed to build upon previous experiences and tailored to fit teacher needs. There was a combination of teacher initiated requests for support and principal directed support towards individuals or teams.

### **Foster Relationships and Collaboration**

This section describes relationships amongst staff at Niyoron Elementary. First, a description of the developing relationship between Ms. Wulft and her newly formed staff

highlights some challenges. Next, a description of Ms. Solt and the different but important relationships she has with her principal and the teachers she coaches.

**Leader versus judge.** When Ms. Wulft started at Niyoron Elementary, it was at the same time that the school had been reconfigured from a K-5 school to a K-3 school. The 2011-2012 staff at Niyoron Elementary became a blended staff of some of the teachers who had been at Niyoron Elementary and a group of teachers coming from another school in the Pago School District. Blending the two staffs has not always been easy. Ms. Wulft found that generally each group of teachers wanted to continue to do things the way they had done then before the reconfiguration. This situation created some tensions in the building. Adding to the tension was Ms. Wulft's clear directive that they were going to follow the district's expectations.

One grade level in particular questioned Ms. Wulft about her visits in the classrooms. Ms. Wulft during her interview shared:

I was in their classroom a lot last year and I don't think that had been the normal rule before. So we've had, we had [a particular] grade planning meeting like a month ago and that's what some of them said, "We feel like you're always coming in to judge us." No, I'm not coming in to judge, I'm just coming to watch and see what is happening. To see what is happening.

The concerns raised by this team also included feeling like Ms. Solt was judging them. Ms. Wulft worked to clear the air that the role of Ms. Solt was to coach and if she did not give them feedback, she would not be doing her job. Ms. Wulft continued to explain to the team that "I can't help you as a leader or a coach either if I do not know what you are struggling with."

Ms. Wulft said she recognizes that teachers need time to talk amongst themselves without her listening in. She did not attend the grade level PLCs that occurred once a week with the reading specialist. Ms. Wulft said “I feel like sometimes they need time to talk about what they are struggling with without me sitting there listening to them. I don’t know if they are as open with me sitting there.”

**A partnership.** When Ms. Wulft moved to Niyoron Elementary, her reading specialist was also reassigned to Niyoron Elementary. Dr. Anders commented on the importance of the relationship between the principal and coach. “We can move reading specialists, so we work with principals on who do they fit with. And we moved reading specialists last year for that reason: . . . This principal works better with this reading specialist, because that relationship is so important for them.”

Ms. Solt describes Ms. Wulft, as “very, very supportive.” She described their interactions: If I just need someone to listen to me, she will. Or she will say, “What do we need to go forward?” and we’ll talk about what we need to do. It is a real partnership. And I think you have to have that because she is the leader of the building, but I’m the instructional coach. So you have to have that partnership and that good working relationship with your principal.

Even though she described her relationship as a partnership, it has its boundaries. “But she also knows there is a line that I can’t cross either. What goes on when I’m talking to this person is between . . . that’s between us and she knows that, too, so she is really respectful of that, too. So that helps.” Ms. Solt also shared that, “It does really help to have a principal who is on board with all of this, too. I couldn’t do it without [Ms. Wulft] . . . doing what she does.”

Ms. Wulft views Ms. Solt as a strong reading specialist necessary to help change the data at Niyoron Elementary. In her interview, Ms. Wulft described frank conversations the two of them had regarding moving the school forward. Ms. Wulft shared that they discuss and plan for how to help teachers move forward at a quick pace due to all the changes in curriculum and the state assessment.

**“I know my teachers.”** Ms. Solt described how she approaches a coaching situation. “I know my teachers well enough to know if they want me to sit side-by-side with them and do a lesson together most of them said, ‘No, I can do it.’ So I would usually model two and they would do two. So, because they could figure it out after modeling.”

She was responsive to their needs. During the interview she said, “Then afterwards if they say, I really need to know more about this, then that is the key. What else do you need from me? I’ve given you this, what else do you feel like you need, what can I do to help you grow as a professional, too?”

Ms. Solt’s view of teachers may play into how she interacts with teachers. She said, I really believe that everybody comes to work wanting to do their best . . . They are here to help kids but sometimes they don’t recognize that they need some help themselves and so you have to be very careful on how you get them to realize that they need some help.

And I’m still learning and it is a process for me to learn how to do that, too.

Ms. Solt recognized that her position can be difficult because of her role. “It’s such a fine line to have to walk because you are not in administration. You are really on the same level as [the teachers], but you’re kind of pseudo-administrative so its a very tough line to walk at times.”

**Summary.** Ms. Wulft faced challenges with some staff because of the school reconfiguration and her practice of regularly observing in the classroom. Teachers were not used to the observations and they sometimes felt judged. Ms. Solt and Ms. Wulft had frank conversations about the needs of the schools and Ms. Solt relied on Ms. Wulft's support.

### **Develop Teacher and Administrator Capacity**

This section describes the ways Ms. Wulft and Ms. Solt ensured they had the knowledge and skills to lead their school in having a literacy program being delivered with fidelity and providing professional development for staff. It describes opportunities for building teacher capacity.

**“What can we do to help you?” -- building teacher capacity.** Guided reading training was one of the first professional development opportunities Ms. Wulft sought for her staff. Ms. Wulft had all teachers of reading attend the sessions, even those who had been trained previously. Ms. Solt shared the following:

[Ms. Warren] offered that on guided reading and we required every teacher in the building to go to that. . . [T]hat was the first year [Ms. Wulft] was here. She had everybody go to that so that she knew that her entire building had been retrained or trained the first time in what guided reading should look like.

To increase the fidelity of the instruction, Ms. Wulft ensured that all her teachers of reading knew the steps in guided reading.

The 10 week coaching plan was another way the leadership worked to build teacher capacity. Ms. Solt shared in her interview:

That was the goal of no pull out . . . We want to really increase the universal curriculum. Make that better. So . . . our goal was to have less pull out and building teacher capacity. So we would go in and we would coach, and we would do a gradual release model of responsibility with the coaching.

To help build teacher capacity, Ms. Wulft was present in the classrooms. She said, “Normally in the mornings, I’m out in the classrooms, most of the time, unless there is some crisis. I’m either going in and watching them, doing some observations, trying to help coach them, working with them.” Ms. Solt described Ms. Wulft as “[S]he still goes in and out of all the classrooms so she has . . . the pulse of the building. She really knows what goes on in all of the rooms. She is really good at that as our leader.”

Ms. Wulft expressed the desire to give teachers what they need while also expecting them to be active participants in setting their goals and meeting their students’ needs:

What can we do to help you . . . beef up your word work or what can we do to help you to beef up your guided reading, or your mini lessons? What do you need? Because the reality is you got to get these kids to move. So you’ve got to figure [it] out. You are going to have to help us with some of that [because] you are the one in here working with them. So, if you got a group of five or six kids that aren’t moving, what can we do to help them move?

The opportunities teachers had to increase their capacity were two fold; they had opportunities at the district level and at the building level. Chapter Four detailed the opportunities for teachers at the district level. In this chapter, the focus was on how the school followed through with professional development in various ways -- through the 10 week

coaching plan, weekly grade level PLCs, monthly release time grade level PLCs, staff meeting PLCs, and ongoing coaching.

**Taking charge of her own learning.** Ms. Wulft took an active role in building her own capacity by taking advantage of the professional development offered in the district. One example was attending the district-wide coaching class by Heidi Laub, an instructor on coaching. Ms. Solt shared that Ms. Wulft often attends the professional development offerings and has been very involved. Ms. Wulft stated that, “I spent a lot of time working on the curriculum piece and that is what I enjoy doing. And so . . . I have spent a lot of time with the reading specialists. I’m not a reading specialist but I’ve spent a lot of time trying to figure out what reading should look like and how it should be implemented in the classrooms.”

**Building capacity to coach and content specific knowledge.** The Reading Specialist PLC in Chapter Four outlined the types of professional development that Ms. Solt participated in at the district-level. Ms. Solt also sought out additional professional development. She shared that she has her reading magazines through the International Reading Association and professional books such as *Pathways to the Common Core* (Calkins et. al., 2012). National speakers and conferences have been a part of her professional development. Examples included her attendance at a Lucy Calkins’s conference on the common core and an acceptance to the Teacher’s College summer institute focused on writer’s workshop. Ms. Solt front loaded her own learning like she did with teachers, by reading the book *Pathways to the Common Core* before attending the conference.

Ms. Solt indicated she is always learning. During her interview she shared that she was going to attend a three credit class focused on coaching. She said, “If this is the position I’m in, I

need my own professional development to learn how to do this better because I don't feel like at a point where I should be with this. . . [I]t kind of evolved into this, an instructional coaching job." Ms. Solt used what the district provided and supplemented it with additional avenues to further her own capacity.

**Summary.** Teachers had professional development at the district level and then followed through at Niyoron Elementary. The goal Ms. Wulft identified centered on building capacity of teachers for the universal instruction. Ms. Wulft spent time in classrooms observing and coaching. Opportunities for professional development for teachers included the guided reading training, 10 week coaching, ongoing coaching, and PLCs. Ms. Wulft expected teachers to be an active participant in identifying their own needs. Ms. Solt and Ms. Wulft assumed responsibility for their own learning and pursued avenues to develop their skills and knowledge.

### **Summary**

Ms. Wulft, the principal and Ms. Solt, the reading specialist, both moved to Niyoron Elementary School in the fall of 2011. One of the changes Ms. Wulft brought to the school was the directive that as a staff they were going to follow the district expectations for literacy. As defined in this chapter, she has demonstrated a clear path of following the district's lead regarding curriculum, instruction, assessment, and using the data to inform decisions. Ms. Wulft followed the district expectations by ensuring her staff knew how to do guided reading groups and, later, how to provide instruction in all four components of balanced literacy. She accomplished this through a variety of ways. She accessed Ms. Warrens (the district reading specialist) to conduct the guided reading sessions, and then she had Ms. Solt (the building reading specialist) follow-up at the school.

Ms. Wulft developed systems to ensure the staff has the time both during the school day and after the school day, for collaborative professional development. Grade level teachers had a 30 minute PLC one day a week to focus on students' performance in acquiring the literacy benchmarks. Ms. Solt facilitated these sessions either by front loading for a coaching session, discussing professional literature, looking at data, or answering teacher driven questions. Each month Ms. Wulft hired substitutes to release staff -- grade level PLCs, special education teachers, the ESL teacher, and the reading specialist -- so they could focus on the data and determine instructional groupings for all students. Once a month, Ms. Wulft's staff meeting included an extra 50 minutes, and she used that time to create a staff PLC focusing on best practices. Teachers prepared for staff meetings by working together in grade level PLCs with an assigned task.

Two other distinct forms of professional development occurred at Niyoron Elementary. The 10 week coaching model provided all teachers with professional development in the four components of balanced literacy using the gradual release of responsibility. The 10 week coaching model did not stand alone. Teachers were asked to read related professional articles ahead of the grade level PLC time. At the grade level PLC, the reading specialist would facilitate a discussion of the article and plan for the upcoming coaching session. Coaching occurred in the classroom during the time of day when literacy would typically occur. Following a coaching session, teachers received feedback from the reading specialist. The other form of professional development was ongoing coaching. This coaching was provided by the reading specialist and occurred anytime and anywhere. Teachers could independently seek out Ms. Solt or, at times, Ms. Wulft directed Ms. Solt to work with a particular teacher on a specific area of literacy.

Professional development also occurred in an informal format. A go-getter, Ms. Preen, attended non-mandatory professional development and tried it out in her classroom. From those experiences, she shared with her colleagues her passion about what her students were learning and also what she, as a professional teacher, was learning. She used the grade level PLC time as a vehicle for sharing with her colleagues.

Teacher capacity was a by-product of the professional development available to teachers. Through the district-wide initiatives -- including the district level PLCs focusing on literacy and the stand alone professional development such as the running record clinic -- teachers could continue to grow their skills. At the building level, teacher capacity was developed by systematically following up on what had occurred at the district level PLCs and by providing coaching both in the 10 week coaching model and ongoing coaching.

Niyoron Elementary School's professional development opportunities reflect a comprehensive plan, first to align what happened at the district level with the building level, and then to create the structures and time for teachers to build their repertoire of skills and deepen their knowledge base. Collaboration amongst teachers became an expectation, with time set aside during the day. Professional learning at Niyoron Elementary School was not an episodic, or isolated occurrence, but rather a well-defined system of continuous improvement.

## **Chapter VI: Binalo Elementary School**

*(Binalo -- Chamorro for Portia, a tree with yellow and purple blossoms)*

In this chapter I present the case of Binalo Elementary School. I begin with a description of the demographics of Binalo Elementary School and provide additional WKCE-CRT and school achievement data. Next, I describe the building level leaders who were interviewed. Lastly, I explore what is happening in professional development through the overarching themes of:

- Leading and staying the course;
- Sustaining coherent And differentiated professional learning opportunities;
- Developing teacher and administrator capacity;
- Fostering relationships and collaboration.

### **School Context**

In 2011-2012, Binalo Elementary School was a kindergarten through third grade school serving about 370 students. Prior to that time it was a pre-kindergarten through fifth grade school serving anywhere between 315-390 students. Since 2001, students identified as economically disadvantaged ranged from 35.6% (2002) to 76.8% (2011). In 2011-2012, Niyoron Elementary demographics were 50.5% white, 18.6% Hispanic, 21.6% African American, 7.7% two or more races, and Asian, American Indian, and Pacific Islander made up the remainder 1.5%. To contrast that to 10 years prior, the demographics in 2001-2002 were 74.6% white, 14.1% African American, and 11.3% Hispanic. Throughout the 10 year span, there have been fluctuations in those identified as African American, white, and Hispanic.

In 2011, 6.2% of the students were English Language Learners. Of the students who were ELL, nearly 92% had Spanish as their first language. In every year, Spanish has been the highest

percentage of ELLs. Over the past 10 years the range of English Language Learners has been as high as 9.5% (2009) and as low as 4.5% (2010).

Achievement data provides a look into the school's past performance. Longitudinal WKCE-CRT data, while not included in criteria for participation in the study, provides information regarding the past and current performance of the sites. Information from testing dates in the fall of 2009 and 2010 is summarized below.

Table 5

*Percentage of Students Identified as Economically Disadvantaged (School and State)*

Binalo Elementary (Pseudonym)	School Percentage of Students Identified as Economically Disadvantaged	State Percentage of Students Identified as Economically Disadvantaged
2010-2011	63.4%	43.2%
2009-2010	60.3%	40.9%

Binalo Elementary exceeds the threshold of 50% identified as economically disadvantaged for both years.

Table 6

*Percentage of Economically Disadvantaged and Reading Achievement on WKCE-CRT*

Binalo Elementary (Pseudonym)	Grade Tested	School % Proficient & Advanced of Economically Disadvantaged	State % Proficient & Advanced of Economically Disadvantaged
2010	3rd	83.4%	68.6%
2009	3rd	90%	66.5%

For these two years, the Binalo Elementary students identified as economically disadvantaged outperformed the state percentage on the WKCE-CRT. If the criteria had been for three years, Binalo Elementary would have met the criteria of this study.

In 2010-2011, Binalo Elementary School met adequate yearly progress on all measures under NCLB. In 2011-2012 school year, the State of Wisconsin began creating report cards with a rating scale of the following: Significantly Exceeds Expectations, Exceeds Expectations, Meets Expectations, Meets Few Expectations, and Fails to Meet Expectations. Binalo Elementary received a “Meets Expectations” rating for the 2011-2012 school year.

### **Binalo Elementary Building Level Leaders**

**Principal Sawyer.** Principal Sawyer has been at Binalo Elementary for 4 years. She has been in the Pago School District for 14 years and the principal in two other Pago schools. Prior to accepting the principalship in the Pago School District, Ms. Sawyer was a teacher for 13.5 years with a broad range of districts including urban, suburban, and rural districts.

Binalo Elementary received the Title I Schools of Recognition by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) for three consecutive years beginning in 2011. The school received the recognition for the category of “Beating the Odds”. The criteria for this recognition is defined by DPI as the following:

- In the top 25 percent of high-poverty schools in the state;
- Above-average student achievement in reading and mathematics when compared to schools from similarly sized districts, schools, grade configurations, and poverty levels.

([http://dpi.wi.gov/files/eis/pdf/dpinr2013\\_103.pdf](http://dpi.wi.gov/files/eis/pdf/dpinr2013_103.pdf))

**Jane Brogen, Binalo Elementary reading specialist.** Ms. Brogen has been with the Pago School District for 10 years. The last three years have been at Binalo Elementary. Ms. Brogen taught and completed her reading teacher certification (316 license) prior to coming to the Pago School District. While looking to relocate to the Pago area, she found the position of reading specialist with the district. Although Ms. Brogen was not certified as a reading specialist, the district offered the position to her provided she agreed to secure a 317 reading specialist license. Ms. Brogen agreed and completed her coursework. In addition to being a reading specialist, Ms. Brogen is a district-wide trainer for Soar to Success -- an intervention program for students in reading.

Ms. Brogen fits the criteria of a teacher leader because she is responsible for delivering professional development through the 10 week coaching, ongoing coaching, and her involvement in the PLCs at Binalo Elementary.

**Kim Frank, Binalo Elementary reading specialist.** Ms. Frank has been with the Pago School District for 11 years. She did her student teaching in the Pago School District in 1995, then taught in other districts before coming back to the Pago District in 2001. Hired as a middle school special education teacher, she later obtained her regular education certification. Ms. Frank moved into a seventh grade language arts position and then into a middle school reading specialist position for two years. She moved Binalo Elementary School in 2012 because she wanted to broaden her experience. Ms. Frank is also working toward her principal certification and curriculum and instruction certification.

Ms. Frank meets the criteria of being a leader for the same reasons as her colleague, Ms. Brogen. Ms. Frank led teachers in the 10 week coaching, ongoing coaching, working with the grade level and district level PLCs, and helping build administrator capacity.

### **Providing Effective Professional Development**

The remainder of this chapter focuses on what the leaders at Binalo Elementary School did to provide effective literacy professional development for staff. It describes the professional development through the four overarching themes of leading and staying the course, sustaining coherent and differentiated learning opportunities, fostering collaboration and relationships, and building capacity.

### **Leading and Staying the Course at Binalo Elementary**

This section describes how Ms. Sawyer, Ms. Frank, and Ms. Brogen have led at Binalo Elementary. Ms. Frank's and Ms. Brogen's roles are very similar, both led through coaching. Ms. Sawyer's role is quite different as the principal. She is responsible for ensuring that district initiatives are implemented at Binalo Elementary.

**Ms. Sawyer's follow through.** Ms. Sawyer has led and stayed the course at Binalo Elementary by following through on the district's expectations. Ms. Sawyer shared examples of several initiatives led by her superintendent. As she described her follow through on one of the initiatives with her staff she said:

I'm a rule follower and the staff know that. If [the district administrators] tell [us] that's what were doing, that's what we're doing. We're not taking short cuts. We're not going to use different materials. We're going to do what they're telling us to do.

In following the path laid out by the district, Ms. Sawyer recognized the responsibility and importance of her own role. She said, “It’s really critical that the building principal make sure that [instruction is being delivered with fidelity is] happening in the building because they can have the best [professional development], but if the principal is not willing to make sure that it is being done in the classrooms, you’re sunk.”

Ms. Sawyer adhered closely to the direction of district leaders. When discussing the role of the reading specialists and how much time she would prefer them to spend coaching, she shared that she would like them to coach 90% of the time. Although this is her vision, she would shift it to match the district’s expectations. She said, “That is just my own personal thing, but I’ll go with whatever, of course, [Dr. Anders] says.”

Ms. Sawyer led and stayed the course by continuing the professional development that began at the district-wide PLC time. The value she sees in the district-wide PLC time is having consistency throughout the buildings. She said, “I think this way we are much more on board than we’ve been in the past because everybody is hearing the same thing at the same time.” Even though her staff has received the staff development during the PLC time, she still has an important leadership role. She describes her role as:

I’ve [got professional development] that is provided for me at the district level. Then what I do is I take what is being taught and expected at the district level and then it is my job to make sure it is incorporated at the building level.

Ms. Sawyer makes sure that what is expected at the district level is followed through at Binalo Elementary by conducting walk throughs. She said:

How I do that . . . is through . . . walk throughs. There are two walk throughs to me.

There is the formal and the informal. The informal is in the iObservation . . . You get a pretty good feel just in a minute of walking in a room and seeing what they are doing.

The superintendent initiated team observations in the 2011-2012 school year. Ms. Sawyer led her staff in this initiative. Ms. Sawyer said, “The team observations are different and we’ve never done them. I’ve always wanted to do this . . . They . . . go into somebody else's room and watch them teach and we give feedback . . . By the end of the year every teacher in the building needs to be observed or go observe.”

Being aware of the district’s expectations, Ms. Sawyer led her staff by following through on the professional development her staff attended to make sure it happened at the school site. She accomplished this through walk throughs and team observations.

**Leading through coaching.** As reading specialists, Ms. Brogen and Ms. Frank led by providing professional development for staff in the form of coaching and working with grade level PLCs. Each reading specialist had specific teachers assigned to them to coach and grade level PLC meetings to attend.

Ms. Brogen and Ms. Frank attended the Friday afternoon reading specialist PLC meetings. During this PLC time the reading specialists from across the district met to build their capacity and to all get on the same page regarding district initiatives. The reading specialists left these meetings with the responsibility of bringing back professional development back to the school and delivering it with fidelity to Binalo Elementary staff.

During the grade level PLCs the reading specialists worked with teachers. Grade level PLCs met twice per week. One meeting focused on data, the other on curriculum. Ms. Sawyer assigned Ms. Brogen and Ms. Frank to attend certain data PLC meetings.

The reading specialists led the 10 week coaching plan and the ongoing coaching. The 10 week plan -- developed at the district level, but delivered by the building reading specialists -- involved the use of a gradual release of responsibility to help the teachers acquire the knowledge and skills of the four components of balanced literacy. On completion of the 10 week coaching plan, the reading specialists assumed leadership roles in providing ongoing coaching at a teacher's request or by their principal's request.

The two reading specialists have similar responsibilities and leadership roles, and both hold a clear vision that guides their work as leaders. Ms. Frank keeps the students as the center of her focus when she leads teachers. She shared during her interview, "We have a moral obligation to the kids -- to be getting things up and going as intended -- and that is all about the kids." Ms. Frank referenced Fullan's work, *The Moral Imperative of School Leadership*, as leadership and change theory that guides her in building capacity so students get the instruction they need.

Ms. Brogen has a vision for her teachers and it guides her in her coaching responsibilities. She has worked in half the schools in the Pago School District. She tells district administrators she will go "wherever you need me." In 2011 an administrator approached her about going to another school because they could use her leadership. A previous supervisor had once told her "she is not going to throw money at intervention if the universal isn't strong." This statement echoed in Ms. Brogen's mind and she realized she did not want "to walk away from [Binalo]." Ms. Brogen's vision of working with teachers to have a solid universal program had

not yet been realized, and she concluded, “I need to stay here at K-3.” As a teacher, she is guided by her dedication to Binalo Elementary staff and her focus on improving the universal instruction to benefit the students.

**Summary.** Ms. Sawyer described herself as a rule follower and has led by following through with the district initiatives. She assessed the needs of her teachers and then planned for and provided professional development opportunities for her staff. Ms. Frank and Ms. Brogen led Binalo Elementary by facilitating learning in the forms of coaching and working with the PLCs. They attended the district reading specialist PLC meetings to build their capacity and then came back to the building level to provide professional development in literacy. They both led with a clear vision guiding their work with teachers.

### **Sustain Coherent, Differentiated Learning Opportunities at Binalo Elementary**

This section details what occurred at Binalo Elementary to sustain professional development and to build coherence in literacy practices, and how it was differentiated for the staff. It should be noted that elements of other themes such as building capacity or relationships also appear in this section. Those themes do not always fit in neat and tidy compartments and naturally are interwoven with this theme. Because of that, like Chapter Four, *Sustain Coherent, Differentiated Learning Opportunities*, this section paints a detailed picture of the professional learning opportunities and in the themes that follow, the specific elements of each are teased apart.

**Terminology used by the reading specialists.** During the interviews, Ms. Brogen and Ms. Frank described two models -- the push-pull model and the learning stages model. These models are briefly described.

**Learning stages model.** As the reading specialists work with teachers, they differentiate their support based on the perceived needs of teachers. The reading specialists PLC have studied the Learning Stages model developed by Noel Burch when he worked at Gordon Training International. This model has four stages of learning: unconscious incompetence, conscious incompetence, conscious competence, and unconscious competence. Ms. Brogen described the four stages as the following:

[Y]ou are either unconsciously or consciously, unskilled or skilled . . . [I]f you are unconsciously unskilled you have no clue that you have no clue. If you are unconsciously skilled, that means you are really good at it you just don't have the confidence to realize it yet . . . [I]f you're consciously unskilled you . . . have no clue what is going on and [you] know [you] don't, so [you want] help . . . [T]hen your consciously skilled also are coachable because they are like "I know this and I've done this and I've tried this but I'm not getting here so what can we do?"

The two groups that seek coaching are the consciously skilled and the unconsciously skilled. Ms. Brogen shared "the unconsciously unskilled don't want to be a part of [the coaching]. They have no clue that there is an issue." The consciously unskilled she said, "It depends. You know deep down they know they really are not doing their job but they don't want anybody else knowing that." One goal, according to Ms. Brogen, "was to coach teachers [to be] reflective teachers." Teachers are described at times in this chapter by where they are at on the Learning Stages Model.

**Push-pull model.** Coaching at Binalo Elementary included a push and pull type of coaching. Hargrove (2008) describes push coaching as being driven by the coach who tries to

convince the teacher to implement certain strategies or practices. Pull coaching describes coaching where the teacher identifies goals and this drives the coaching process. Specific references to these types of coaching occur throughout this chapter.

**Focus on the universal through 10 week coaching.** The 10 week coaching model began in the fall of 2012. Ms. Sawyer said most of her staff did not like it because the reading specialists could not pull students for interventions. Ms. Sawyer said:

[The teachers] were very frustrated because we just started intervention bands a couple of years ago and of course those could not start officially until the coaching was done. They really wanted their lowest [students], the LLI kids, taken out and have [Ms. Brogen] work with them right away . . . [T]he whole thing is trying to make them be more responsible so they learn to deal with those kids . . .

In this instance, the teachers wanted the reading specialist, Ms. Brogen, to provide guided reading instruction to students not successful in the universal instruction. Ms. Sawyer recognized that teachers needed professional development in the universal and therefore needed teachers to be coached to build their capacity.

The 10 week coaching plan was a district initiative, and it used a gradual release of responsibility model. The process Binalo Elementary followed was shared by Ms. Frank:

Starting out we did interactive read aloud where you go through and you demonstrate the lesson, you do a . . . shared piece, you guide them through the piece and then get them to independence.

Following the interactive read aloud, the reading specialists coached in the other components -- shared reading and guided reading. All teachers of reading participated in each of these two week

long components. Prior to each component, discussions occurred about what types of things one would look for. The information was put into a google doc so all teachers would have access to the shared information.

Differentiation involved working with a teacher until she had acquired the skills to do it independently. Ms. Frank shared an example from the guided reading coaching session. She used the Touchpoints, an informal running record, to decide how long a teacher needed coaching. She shared if, “they could [do] the Touchpoint running record, I felt I could back off. If they were not really comfortable with that running record piece, [I would try] to stay in there and keep with them.”

**The whole gamut -- ongoing coaching.** Ongoing coaching at Binalo Elementary occurred throughout the year and as a follow-up to the 10 week coaching plan. After the introduction of a specific component, such as interactive read aloud, the coaches observed the classrooms to determine if teachers implemented the strategies with fidelity. There was not a set format for ongoing coaching. Ms. Frank described ongoing coaching as the following:

I try to do the whole spectrum of the different types of coaching. Some people I’m . . . only doing the formalized piece. It’s more of a -- cognitive, sitting down, talking about it -- and either telling them where resources are [or] what to look for.

The types of ongoing coaching varied from whole group to one-on-one depending on teachers’ needs. Ms. Frank shared the types of coaching from the work of Moran (2007) ranged “from presentations -- to focused classroom visits -- to co-planning -- to study groups -- to lesson demonstrations -- to peer coaching -- to co-teaching. Trying to do all, the whole gamut.” The reading specialists assumed the role of coaching staff based on what staff needed.

Ms. Sawyer used ongoing coaching to provide tailored professional development for her teachers. If, during her observations, she saw an area that was not being carried out as intended, she initiated a coaching session. Ms. Sawyer asked questions through iObservation about the lesson and she said, “I get a very good feel by their response if they know what they are talking about and if they are really carrying it out the way I want them to . . . [I]f they are not, I’ll call for [Ms. Brogen] or [Ms. Frank]. That will be another area or a different area for them to coach.”

Ongoing coaching was initiated by the principal or the teacher. Ms. Sawyer assigned some staff members to meet on a two week rotation with a reading specialist. Ms. Brogen approached these types of situations by appealing to the teacher as a colleague. Ms. Brogen felt it was a “balance . . . between administrative evaluative and being a colleague.” As she initiated the conversation with the teacher she often said something to the effect of, “I know that this may not exactly be the first thing that you’re hoping to do but I’ve been directed by my principal to [coach you on a particular topic . . .], so let’s just do it.”

Consciously skilled teachers did not get assigned to a reading specialist. Ms. Brogen said, “They are ones that are going to come to me anyway.” Ms. Brogen believes that to change practices and learn something new, it takes time for teachers to process the information. Ms. Brogen noticed that a few days to a week after having a professional conversation with a teacher that often the teacher would come back and say, “That’s what you were trying to say. Now it makes sense.” To give an example, Ms. Brogen shared a time when she had gone into the classroom of an exceptional teacher to observe. Uninvited, Ms. Brogen began instructing alongside the teacher during the lesson. Ms. Brogen said the teacher looked uncomfortable and had a look on her face that asked, “Why are you talking when my group is going on?” but the

teacher went with the flow and followed Ms. Brogen's lead. Several days later, the teacher came back to Ms. Brogen and said, "That's it, that's the missing piece. I never understood."

Consciously skilled teachers at Binalo Elementary welcomed the reading specialists into their classrooms. While visiting a classroom one day, Ms. Brogen noticed during instruction that the teachers had not fully explained a concept. From previous visits where Ms. Brogen had joined in their class discussions, Ms. Brogen knew the team was comfortable with her jumping in and coaching on the spot, so she did so. Ms. Brogen said, "[These teachers] hear it once from you and they take off. They don't mind me coming in." Ms. Brogen enjoys an open relationship where she can interject in a lesson and provide coaching in the moment. While the teachers did not actively seek coaching, this type of spontaneous coaching helped to build their capacity because they felt comfortable with the reading specialist observing in their room and interjecting during instruction.

One consciously unskilled teacher, who had moved from an upper grade to a lower grade position, sought out coaching to build her capacity. This teacher came to Ms. Brogen and was being upfront about not knowing how to help a student who struggled with phonemic awareness. The teacher said, "What can you suggest? Just give me anything." Ms. Brogen explained in her interview, "I'll give her some ideas to get started and then she just takes off." This teacher recognized that she did not have the skills she needed to teach phonemic awareness, and she sought out the support to build her capacity.

Ms. Frank shared an ongoing coaching example of close reading, a strategy used to increase reading comprehension. She found some teachers quickly became independent and did not need intensive support. Ms. Frank noticed that these teachers looked for their own research

about best practices regarding close reading and experimented with various strategies. Ms. Frank's support was minimal and only involved asking, "Do you need anything from me?"

For others, it involved working together more intensively. The reading specialists became responsible for setting the lesson up, doing the demonstrations, and getting the materials for the teachers. A gradual release of responsibility model guided the reading specialists. Ms. Frank said, "I'll do it on my own with you . . . watching, and they'll we do a shared, and then we'll guide." In these examples, the reading specialist differentiated the learning opportunities to meet the needs of teachers she coached.

Ms. Frank shared an example of a teacher who needed differentiated professional development in her introduction for guided reading. Typically, an introduction takes about 5 minutes, but this particular staff member's guided reading introduction took between 25-30 minutes. Ms. Frank told the teacher, "We want the students making the meaning, not the teacher." To help move this teacher Ms. Frank shared the following story of supporting this teacher:

The first step was -- because I wasn't there for their [professional development] -- I . . . acted like, "Well, just in case you've never seen it, let's go through this again." . . . [T]his person really wanted to take me in different direction and tell me what they were doing . . . I had to . . . do that . . . push-pull. Let's pull and let's do the professional development -- "This is what we're looking for." Going back in [to the classroom] and the introduction was way too long. Then I did more modeling, so I did the 5 minutes. [W]hat we saw . . . when I only did the 5 minutes of modeling, the kids could read the book, I mean they could decode it but they couldn't make any meaning. "Well, they can

make meaning for me,” [said the classroom teacher]. “Well, is it because you front loaded all the meaning to begin with?” . . . [T]rying to do that in a very nonthreatening . . . way . . . I said, “You just need to shorten your introduction a little bit.”

When asked about the length of the teacher’s guided reading introductions after the coaching sessions, Ms. Frank said they tend to be 8-9 minutes long.

Coaching involved listening and observing. When determining what teachers need Ms. Frank shared that she is listening and stepping back before giving suggestions:

Listening to what [it] is they are saying. Listen to what is going on and then also taking a step back, “Okay, what’s truly happening?” [Teachers may] tell me something is happening . . . [but] maybe it’s not. So stepping back and taking a look and coming up with a multiple suggestions for how they can get to where they want to go.

After the teacher had assessed the situation, Ms. Frank responded with a pull model of coaching.

To support ongoing coaching, the reading specialists looked at the teaching style of the teacher and then shared strategies and practices. Ms. Frank said, “They don't necessarily want to hear theory from books” but teachers want to know, “What truly is going to work?” An example shared by Ms. Frank involved coaching Daily 5, a management system used in balanced literacy. Ms. Frank said, “[T]here are so many ways to get the management system going. Finding something that works for them.” In a pull coaching situation Ms. Frank shared that she provided teachers with examples of what works well and then solicited teacher feedback with questions such as, “What do you think [is] going to work best?” The choice was often left to the teachers, and Ms. Frank shared with them that the best option for that teacher “depends on the type of follow through you've got, the type of students you're working with, [and] the behavior system

you have.” Ms. Frank summarized the coaching as “listening to what they need and giving them some really good options for them to choose from and knowing then when to push and pull.”

The coaches, at times, employed a push model of coaching. Ms. Frank worked with a teacher who had guided reading groups with nine students in them. Typically a reading group would have between four to six students. The coach approached the teacher and asked if she wanted to look at the data, and received a “no” response. Ms. Frank began pushing by suggesting they analyze the benchmark assessment system running records data. Using the data, Ms. Frank and the teacher re-organized students into instructional groups of four, five, or six students.

Another example of push coaching occurred in classrooms regarding Daily 5, a program that had been mandated but not implemented in all classrooms. Ms. Frank initiated the coaching by articulating the expectations and sending emails of what it could look like in their classroom. She followed-up with teachers and offered to cover their classes so they could visit a colleague’s classroom that had Daily 5 already operating. The reading specialists became coaches who had to coach in a push model to get it running in the classrooms.

The reading specialists used technology as a tool to coach their teachers. In one scenario, the teacher sought feedback on her interactive read aloud. Ms. Frank used her iPad to document the lesson. Following the lesson, the coach and teacher met to look at the data. The teacher realized the students went off task at 15 minutes. At this particular grade level, the interactive read aloud lesson should be at most 15 minutes long. Using the iPad to capture the lesson and the students’ behavior and then sitting down together to analyze it, Ms. Frank coached the teacher and helped the teacher to conclude that her lessons needed to be shorter in length. It allowed the teacher to arrive at the solution on her own rather than being told.

Ongoing coaching is not always as successful as the reading specialists would like it to be. Ms. Brogen shared that, “The hardest part is when they are unconsciously unskilled or they are consciously unskilled [and] they are resistant to every time you come in.” She said the teachers often offer reasons or excuses that what is being suggested cannot work in their classroom. Ms. Brogan said, “ You just have to let that go and say I’m not going to save everybody and [hope that] maybe down the line that it’s going to sink in.”

The reading specialists’ intervention schedules interfered with the ongoing coaching model. In a previous year, limited intervention groups existed, and Ms. Brogen coached the majority of the day. In the 2012-2013 school year, intervention groups occurred in the morning with coaching in the afternoon. The challenge became finding time to observe in the classrooms and to provide feedback. Ms. Brogen had intervention groups all morning while the classrooms taught literacy. Conversations outside the classroom informed the type of coaching Ms. Brogen could provide for her teachers.

If the teachers are reflective, Ms. Brogen felt they could have a dialogue and she could support their learning. An exchange she had with a teacher about gaining information from a running record called the Touchpoint illustrates this point.

I said, “Well what are you getting from the Touchpoint?” . . . I can talk to her about what she is getting and she can be reflective and says, “I know they’ve got the accuracy but I don’t know if they’ve got the comprehension and I don’t know if they’ve got the stamina.” . . . [W]e can back and forth on that conversation.

In these types of discussions, Ms. Brogen felt she could support the teacher and her learning. In other situations, Ms. Brogen felt unable to change the teacher's practice. Unconsciously unskilled teachers come to the meetings and do not engage in the conversation.

Ms. Sawyer also recognized that the school's schedule interfered with ongoing coaching. With the reading specialists conducting intervention groups during the literacy instruction period, the observation portion did not happen even though Ms. Sawyer had assigned some teachers to be on a two-week coaching rotation. Only scheduled reflective conversations outside of the classroom could occur, but certain teachers did not reflect on their practice. Ms. Brogen said, "That is the hardest part is to try and turn something I know that has to change but they're not reflective enough to know it has to change."

**Focusing on students at grade level PLCs.** In accordance with the district's strategic plan, the PLCs at the building level occurred twice a week. One focused on data and the other on curriculum. Ms. Sawyer shared that this was the superintendent's idea. According to Ms. Sawyer, during the time she worked with teachers:

I'm trying to differentiate for them just like they do for the [students] . . . and I really . . . believe strongly in having them know what goes on before and after their grade levels . . .

That is something I've been trying to incorporate in the PLCs.

During one of these data PLC meetings, Ms. Sawyer noticed all students were not achieving the benchmarks. At the grade level PLC she asked teachers to create a plan for each student who was below the benchmark. She said to the teachers:

[A]ny [student] that is below the mean . . . in reading and math, you are going to write a little [individualized education plan] on each [student]. I want individual student plans. I

said, I want you to tell me what they are lacking in, the areas of concern. I want you to write up a plan on how you are going to address this until the end of the year. I want specifics.

Many of the plans she received from the teachers were not specific enough. Recognizing that it was not an isolated situation with a few teachers, she decided to focus the professional development at a staff meeting PLC.

Each grade level PLC data meeting was attended by Ms. Brogen, Ms. Frank, or Ms. Sawyer. During these meetings, according to Ms Brogen, They talked “about kids, and data, and switching groups, interventions.” Teachers come to the meeting with data to plan for instructional needs. Ms. Brogen described a typical meeting:

Teachers will either bring their grids with the data or their literacy data binders. Each teacher has a literacy behavior data binder that we’ve put together and it helps them with guided reading. [T]hey have the expectations for Fountas and Pinnell, they have the standards for their grade level, they have for Touchpoints they have what the comprehension conversation could be. In the front [of the binder] they’ve got . . . some possible prompts and from the prompting guide based on what you see and on the back they have some conversation questions -- within, beyond, and about the text. [T]hen each teacher has . . . a card stock progress monitoring piece on each child . . . They use [the data] to say, “Have kids been placed right? Do we need to change groups? Do we have any more kids in need?” [For example in] kindergarten, “Do we have any kids still in need of letter [identification]? Do we have any kids that now need to go blending or segmenting or high frequency words? Or if these kids are not in need of anything, what

could we provide for them enrichment wise?” It might be writing . . . [T]hey use that to determine where their needs are. In our schedule we have set aside intervention band. So they have the 90 minutes of literacy scheduled into their day and then they have a 30 or 45 intervention band.

The grade level PLCs used their time to plan for the intervention bands. They used the time to analyze the data to determine the students’ needs, who could teach a group, and how they would provide instruction to help students reach the benchmarks.

**Using staff meetings to become a PLC.** Ms. Sawyer used her staff meeting time for professional development. She had staff meetings the first three Wednesdays of every month, with one of the meetings including an additional 40 minutes. Ms. Sawyer assessed the needs of her staff and used the staff meeting time to provide differentiated learning opportunities. One specific example she shared evolved from data examined at grade level PLC meetings. In the previous section, Ms. Sawyer shared how she had asked for and had not received detailed individual student plans for students below benchmark in reading or math. For this reason she brought the topic of writing individual student plans to a staff meeting. Her plan for the staff meeting:

I went in and cherry picked some teachers that really [went] in depth with how they are going to deliver the instruction because that is where they struggle. Of course that’s [response to intervention], and we need to beef it up. So we are going to . . . take that 40 minutes today and have feedback and have people give some suggestions, especially for the ones who are . . . struggling.

**Summary.** At Binalo Elementary Ms. Sawyer focused on the universal instruction for her professional development. All teachers received the 10 week coaching. The ongoing coaching became the vehicle for differentiation and the coaches used the Learning Stages model and assessed whether they needed to do push or pull type of coaching. Coaching occurred at the request of the teacher or by request of the principal. Further professional development occurred in grade level PLCs through analysis of student data and planning for instruction. The staff meetings functioned as PLCs and a learning opportunity when Ms. Sawyer recognized her entire staff needed training in writing individual student plans. Through these means, the professional development at Binalo Elementary was sustained and differentiated.

### **Foster Relationships and Collaboration**

This section describes the relationships between principal -- staff, principal -- coaches, and coach -- teacher. In each, those interviewed provided examples of how they work on building strong relationships. At Binalo Elementary, the focus on collaboration occurred mostly at the PLCs.

**“Work smarter, not harder” -- collaboration.** Ms. Sawyer worked to move her staff forward in their learning. She had asked her teachers to write specific plans for the students below benchmark in math or reading when she did not get the level of detail she wanted, she did not become frustrated. Instead, she said of the process, “I wasn’t specific in enough in my email, but that is okay because we got a start . . . It is kind of interesting and fun.”

Ms. Sawyer recognized that the majority of staff needed professional development on how to create individualized plans for students below benchmarks. She used this as an opportunity to foster collaboration by having a staff meeting function as a PLC to work together

to create detailed individual student plans. Ms. Sawyer's rationale for structuring the learning this way is from DuFour's work with PLCs, which focuses on collaboration and teachers learning together. Ms. Sawyer explained, "[I] thought we might as well do this at the [staff meeting] PLC and work smarter, not harder."

**Trusting one another.** Ms. Sawyer conveys an openness with her staff. Teachers' ability to analyze data varies at Binalo Elementary. One teacher confided to Ms. Sawyer that she had not done anything with the data. Ms. Sawyer's responded:

"I appreciate the honesty and that is okay . . . I'll take you where you are at and we'll go from there." I just want the willingness to work . . . I'm hoping some of my ones that are struggling to get those instructional pieces . . . how to really implement [response to intervention], will get some of those examples and get it going . . . [S]ome just struggle and [for] some it comes really naturally.

Ms. Sawyer built relationships with her teachers by learning alongside them and confiding that she, too, is learning. In describing the purpose of the team observations to the teachers, she said:

"You know . . . you're experts at your grade level and I'm supposed to be an expert at four of these [grade levels] and now 4K [is] coming too." So I said, "This is how I learn too. So I don't know it all." I can tell what good teaching is and what isn't but I'm learning right along with them in a lot of things. That, I think, makes them feel better and makes them feel like they are able to be honest with me and take risks, and put themselves out there . . . [N]ot like I'm "a gotcha thing" because I said, "This is not the purpose of them at all." . . . I said, "We need to work truly as a team."

Ms. Sawyer fostered relationships with her teachers by supporting them in their growth. As part of the educator effectiveness model -- an evaluation system the state is implementing -- Ms. Sawyer told her staff what she would be looking for during her observations:

“[Best practices] is what I’m going to be looking for. The other half is going to be different assessments” . . . [W]e have to work as a team and we have to trust each other. If you are struggling in an area, you need some help, just let me know . . . and I will help you.”

**Formative versus summative.** Ms. Sawyer, Ms. Brogen, and Ms. Frank all understand their different roles at Binalo Elementary. Ms. Sawyer said, “I sat down with [Ms. Brogen and Ms. Frank] because . . . I need to be the principal. These are their colleagues. I’m the one who evaluates the teachers, not them. We came up with what they felt comfortable with.”

The reading specialists recognized the fine line between colleague and administrator. Ms. Frank shared she is the formative piece and Ms. Sawyer is the summative piece. This distinction helped her in the coaching. She found that when a teacher’s summative evaluation did not go well, the teacher sought her out for coaching. She saw the support from Ms. Sawyer as essential.

Ms. Brogen shared she worked hard to maintain her trusting relationship with Ms. Sawyer. She also recognized the important role Ms. Sawyer played in helping her to coach resistant teachers. She said, “[U]ntil they’re made a little uncomfortable with their weaknesses, they won’t come to me.”

**Trust between coach and teacher.** The reading specialists, acting as coaches, worked closely with the teachers. Because of this, the coaches put effort into developing a solid relationship with the teachers. Ms. Sawyer shared that typically the reading specialists did not

move around from year-to-year because they needed to establish a strong rapport with the teachers.

Valuing teachers and treating them as professionals fostered a stronger relationship. Ms. Brogen described it as:

Valuing what the teachers already know. When you are learning something new it is so hard to be behind the eight ball. You feel like you'll never catch up or you'll never catch on, or it is one more thing. But if you can value them and what they can bring to the table, they are much more willing to participate and cooperate and bring something else to the table.

In building relationships, the reading specialists responded to what the teaching staff need. Ms. Frank described as:

I try to whenever we're doing something [to] be an active participant. I always dig in, "Oh, can I find that? Can I find this for you?" Some people would say that is enabling, some people would say I need to be an equal participant. I need to be doing some work and they need to see that I'm doing work . . . [I]f they see that you're just sitting there not doing a lot . . . there ends up being some hostility there. "You're not working. I'm not getting my prep." So I really try to dig right in. "What do you need? What can I find? Can I find you something? Can I email it?" I try to work just as hard [as them].

Ms. Frank conveys to teachers that they are colleagues. An example she shared during the guided reading 10 week coaching involved teachers sharing their guided reading lesson before they began the coaching part of guided reading. Ms. Frank said, "We tried to mix that up a little

bit . . . Instead of . . . [the reading specialist being] the expert, because we're not the experts. We're -- everybody's along in this, in the same journey.

Building a relationship is essential for Ms. Brogen. Ms. She views the relationship as a cornerstone of her work with teachers and Ms. Sawyer. Ms. Brogen, in her interview said:

[I]t is so much about relationships and for me it is a lot more about relationships than it is about close reading and common core standards because that will come if you get the relationship. So I spend so much more of my time making sure that I've got the relationship with [Ms. Sawyer] where she trusts me, the relationship with the teachers where they trust me, and I spend that time processing what can I do to make sure that that balance is still there.

Ms. Brogen worked on balancing the positive relationship with staff and being a coach to build their capacity. Ms. Brogen shared her perspective on maintaining the relationship and she wants them to feel:

That they're still willing to ask me questions and not feel like a fool if they do . . . or feel . . . unskilled if they do . . . [O]r be willing to say, . . . "I thought I knew everything about teaching and now this is something new." [A] lot of times I will preface it by saying, "I know this is how we've always done it but new research shows . . ." So I spend a lot of time being real careful about what I say and how I say it because . . . some of my teachers are just absolutely amazing, and don't even know it yet.

Ms. Brogen finds fulfillment in having strong relationships with teachers and seeing them succeed, noting, "The people part of this job is the part that keeps me in it. Because if they said

to me you are going to start planning curriculum and professional development and delivering that, I don't know if I'd still be doing this.”

Ms. Frank said she works at building relationships with staff by:

Getting in there and talking with people . . . [B]eing there and just not going away.

Stopping in a couple times a week, “How are things going?” . . . [A]sking, . . . “Is your interactive read aloud going well? Have you found any cool materials?” Because there is something always academic going on, there is always something with literacy you can talk about whether it is intervention or data.

At times a relationship might not be on solid footing even with all the work put into building a positive, trusting relationship. Ms. Brogen shared a detailed account about a time of uncertainty in her relationship with a particular veteran teacher. Ms. Brogen decided to go to the teacher and have a conversation. Ms. Brogen recounted the context and conversation during her interview:

I was looking over some data and I had gone to her. I said, “You know, I’m wondering why this child is still in Soar if all of their Soar benchmarks say they are . . . 100%. I looked up his [benchmark assessment system data and] I looked up his [Measures of Academic Performance data and], he’s looking pretty solid.” I said, “I’m not sure why he’s in Soar.” And she’s like, “Well, I was just thinking that. I was thinking to myself, should I let [a particular student] go? . . . [B]ut I had to check with . . . the expert.” . . . I wasn’t sure how to take that . . . and she had said something to that effect earlier. So earlier this week I went to her and I said, “[I] just wanted to touch base with you.” I said, “When we were talking about [a particular student] you mentioned you wanted to go to

‘the expert’ . . . If I have ever made some sort of assumption or any sort of hint to you that I didn’t value your professional judgement . . . please know that was never intentional.” She goes, “No, no . . . I guess I just wanted a second opinion because . . . the things I was seeing . . . you were seeing . . . [B]ecause he came in at an A and now is at an H, and I thought how could he make that growth? . . . I was just making sure I wasn’t missing anything.” . . . I said, “Oh, okay because I was a little concerned that you maybe thought I was condescending when [you said], “Well I have to ask ‘the expert.’”

Ms. Brogen and the teacher concluded their conversation with agreeing that they were “good” with each other. Ms. Brogen saw challenging the relationship as necessary in maintaining a healthy working relationship, although not an easy thing to do.

Ms. Frank also experienced resistance by teachers. Ms. Frank said she sometimes needs to give a clear message. When facing resistance, Ms. Frank said she has to tell them, “[T]his is what the expectations are . . . [T]his is what it could look like . . . [T]his is what we are expecting right now’ . . . Sometimes . . . being real upfront, ‘This is what you need to do.’”

Both reading specialists mentioned the importance of trust. Ms. Frank said teachers get nervous if she takes notes or pulls out a laptop. If during the conversation she has written something down, she tears it up at the conclusion of the meeting to build trust. Also, she does not use a teacher’s name in her notes. Instead, she codes it. She said, “If I start losing trust, it is going to be hard to get that piece back.”

Confidentiality is maintained in conversations between teacher and coach. At times, this confidentiality faces a challenge. The reading specialists, when acting as a coach, might receive sensitive information, and must determine what to keep confidential. Ms. Brogen did not share

specifics but did share that she has been put into a position where someone told her something in confidence but it rose to a level where she felt she needed to tell another party. Because the reading specialists want to maintain their trusting relationship, Ms. Brogen said she goes “back to that teacher and [says], ‘I realize you told me that in confidence but this is bigger than you and [me] and I need to [tell someone] . . . [T]his is the way I’m going to do it, and I will try to protect your professional integrity.’”

**Summary.** Ms. Sawyer works to be open and honest with her staff. She fosters a positive relationship by learning alongside them and encouraging them to work together as a team. She looks for the willingness to learn and encourages them to come to her when they need support or help.

The line between the principal and reading specialists’ positions can be blurry, but at Binalo Elementary Ms. Sawyer, Ms. Frank, and Ms. Brogen discussed their roles and reached consensus on their responsibilities. Ms. Sawyer acts as the summative piece, the reading specialists as the formative piece.

The reading specialists put a substantial amount of energy into building positive relationships with the staff. They value what the teachers know, actively participate in the coaching sessions, and respond to teachers’ needs. At times, relationships face challenges and the reading specialists initiate honest, open conversations to clear the air. Messaging about district non-negotiables are delivered clearly along with communication about the support they will provide.

### **Develop Teacher and Administrator Capacity**

This theme shares the ways Ms. Sawyer, Ms. Frank, and Ms. Brogen worked on building teacher capacity of the universal instruction. As a leader, they also had to build their own capacity. The routes they chose in building their capacity are highlighted.

**Moving toward “walking the walk.”** Ms. Sawyer knew her staff needed professional development in universal instruction. She said, “ They’ve been struggling with [response to intervention] . . . They can talk the talk, but they’re not walking the walk.” She works to have the teachers take ownership for their learning. In a discussion about the role of coaching, she said, “[I]f I don’t get the teachers to take responsibility and to learn the proper things, nothing is going to change.”

Ms. Sawyer acts strategically in staffing to foster teachers learning from one another. She has the flexibility to assign staff to teams or as an individual classroom. In regards to staffing for the upcoming year, she said, “I’m basing that on strengths, and I’m strategically trying to place people together that I think will shore another person up.”

Ms. Sawyer built capacity through feedback from observations and walk throughs. Ms. Sawyer shared that it is a struggle to find time to have individual conversations and she uses iObservation to give feedback, although she recognizes that it does not have the personal touch she would prefer. The interactions through iObservation help her build the capacity of her staff. Ms. Sawyer said, “I get a very good feel by their response if they know what they are talking about and if they are really carrying it out the way I want them to . . . [I]f they are not, I’ll call for [Ms. Brogen] or [Ms. Frank]. That will be another area or a different area for them to coach.”

The 10 week coaching plan focused on building teacher capacity. Ms. Frank felt there were mixed results. When asked about whether teachers had sustained the instructional practices, she said:

I feel like teachers who were strong anyway, kept those . . . [T]hey . . . maybe needed a tweak, they needed a little bit of modeling, whatever, they maintained it. Other teachers who probably struggled before, struggled to keep a lot of this and are still struggling.

Ongoing coaching continued throughout the year. Ms. Frank found an effective question to prompt teachers to reflect on their needs: “How do you want to increase your teacher capacity?” Being responsive proved to be important to ongoing coaching. Ms. Frank shared instances where teachers changed their preferences for coaching. When teachers said to her, ‘[I] know we said we wanted to work on this, but I'd really like to work on this piece now.’ Ms. Frank replied, “That’s . . . okay, that’s fine. We can change directions if you want to work on prompting a little bit more.” Being responsive to teacher’s requests and needs, supported their ability to build their capacity and to be in charge of their learning. As Ms. Frank said:

It is about what their needs are . . . I can push my agenda all I want but if that isn’t something they are ready for to move, then it’s not going to work. As long as we’re doing something with literacy, there are so many things that we can do.

Despite having the 10 week coaching, PLC professional development, and ongoing coaching, some teachers resisted changing their practices. Ms. Brogen has heard everything from “That takes a lot of time. I don’t have the time to do that.” to “I hope you don’t expect me to do this dog and pony show everyday.” Ms. Brogen was left with the feeling of, “Where do you go with that?”

**Developing capacity alongside teachers.** Ms. Sawyer takes responsibility for her own learning. In describing one of the professional development opportunities staff attended, Ms. Sawyer said, “They just started the read alouds . . . Those are excellent. I’m still learning myself. That is another reason I like the walk throughs.” Ms. Sawyer attended the read aloud training and then followed up at her school to see that teachers implemented the strategies.

Ms. Sawyer used the team observations as another way to build her capacity. In describing the team observations, she said, “I learned a ton in it, too.” She recognized that she needs to be an “expert” in all the grade levels, and she is learning alongside them.

The reading specialists increased the capacity of administrators. A few years ago, the reading specialists created checklists of what the components of balanced literacy should look like. Ms. Brogen worked with principals and the checklists. She describes how they were used:

The principal could go into independent reading, shared reading, guided reading, and read aloud and see what’s working and what’s not. What is the teacher doing? What are the students doing? What materials are available?

These checklists served as a way for principals to gauge the level of implementation of balanced literacy instruction in the classrooms.

Through professional discussions about best practices in reading, the reading specialists worked with their administrator to increase their capacity. The reading specialists did not always have a scheduled time where they worked with the principal. Ms. Frank shared that it occurred whenever they had an opportunity to talk. The reading specialists shared with Ms. Sawyer what the component should look like before Ms. Sawyer conducted observations. As new components

of balanced literacy were introduced, the reading specialists talked with Ms. Sawyer before her walk throughs and observations.

**Taking charge of their learning.** Both reading specialists assumed responsibility for their professional learning. Ms. Frank is pursuing her principal certification and curriculum and instruction certification. Ms. Frank and Ms. Brogen participated in the district-provided course on instructional coaching by Heidi Laub. Weekly, the reading specialists attended the reading specialist PLC meetings and developed their capacity through reading books such as *When Readers Struggle* by Fountas and Pinnell (2009). In addition to her coaching responsibilities, Ms. Brogen assumed the role as district trainer for Soar to Success, an intervention program. To prepare for this role, she participated in the Soar to Success training provided by the author and researcher Dr. J. David Cooper.

**Summary.** Ms. Sawyer focused on building the capacity of teachers at the universal level. To accomplish this goal she directed her reading specialists to coach teachers through the 10 week coaching, to engage in ongoing coaching, and through the PLC meetings. Ms. Sawyer provided feedback from her walk throughs and observations and worked toward teachers assuming responsibility for their learning. As she developed her staffing plan, Ms. Sawyer strategically placed together staff members who could learn from each other.

The reading specialists, following Ms. Sawyer's direction, responded to the needs of the teachers primarily through coaching. They built the capacity of the staff by being clear about the expectations and then allowed teachers to determine their goals while supporting them along the way.

Ms. Sawyer assumed responsibility for her own learning. She attended the professional development her teachers attended. The reading specialists also served as a resource for the principal. They talked with her about best practices and what to look for during her walk throughs.

The reading specialists regularly received professional development to build their capacity through the reading specialist PLC. Both teachers took the lead on their own learning through additional coursework.

### **Summary**

Ms. Sawyer, knowing the district's initiatives, took that charge and created a plan for how to get her staff there. She describes herself as a rule follower, and she is not willing to take shortcuts or divert off the path in moving toward her goals. She saw -- and still sees -- one particular area they struggle with as a staff -- a solid universal instruction with staff taking responsibility for their own learning and the students' results. As Ms. Sawyer described it, they were "talk[ing] the talk, but are not walking the walk." Ms. Sawyer's plan includes relying heavily on two other leaders -- Ms. Frank and Ms. Brogen, her two reading specialists -- to reach their destination.

Relationships matter to the leaders of Binalo Elementary. Ms. Sawyer looks for that, "willingness to work" and sends a message to staff that she will, "Take you where you are at and we'll go from there." It is not about an individual, it is about "we" and "team". She stresses to her teachers that "we" have to work together to achieve "our" goals. She is clear with staff that she will be looking for best practices when she observes. She sets the bar high and extends a

lending hand. She told them, “If you are struggling in an area, you need some help, just let me know . . . and I will help you.”

Relationships are important to Ms. Brogen. “The people part of this job is the part that keeps me in it.” When working with teachers she values what they already know and can bring to the table. Ms. Brogen believes if the relationship is strong, the professional learning will happen and teachers will acquire the skills. Without the relationship, it won’t happen. To Ms. Brogen the quality of the relationship “determines how effective coaching is, and therefore how effective they are with their students.” While she values the “people part” ultimately she is in this role for the students. As an interventionist she can have an effect on 25 students a year but by coaching teachers the impact can have an effect up to 350 students in a year. Ms. Brogen summarized it as, “My relationships with those teachers determines how effect[ive] coaching is, and therefore how effective they are with their students. We are a team working towards the same goal, student achievement. Building teacher capacity is my way of making a difference for our students.”

Ms. Frank, as the newest leader to Binalo Elementary, sees developing trust and following her beliefs as guiding her in her leadership role. Ms. Frank builds trust by being an equal and active participant. She wants teachers to see her working at least as hard as they work. She will do whatever that takes -- from creating documents to finding resources. Ms. Frank is guided by her role as it relates to student learning. As she describes her role, “We are here to coach the teacher capacity up to give the kids what they need.”

Ms. Brogen has the same goal as Ms. Sawyer: To build a strong universal instructional program. When approached about moving to another school, Ms. Brogen reflected on a mantra of a former supervisor: [Don’t] throw money at intervention if the universal isn’t strong.’ That

statement echoed in her head, and she realized she wanted to stay at Binalo Elementary because the universal needed to strengthen. There were still too many students needing interventions. She wanted to continue increasing her coaching responsibilities while still intervening with a goal of minimal interventions needed.

Ms. Frank's goals align with those of Ms. Sawyer. Ms. Frank thinks about her students. Ms. Frank believes, "We have a moral obligation to the kids -- to be getting things up and going as intended -- and that is all about the kids." The "Getting things up and going as intended" is the universal instruction. Ms. Frank sees her role as coaching teachers in the universal instruction so students are successful in the classroom.

Ms. Sawyer laid out a path focusing on building capacity of the staff through differentiated professional development. The 10 week coaching plan, ongoing coaching, and structuring PLC time as professional learning time are the ways she provided for professional development. The 10 week coaching plan, initiated at the district level, provided everyone with professional development in the four components of balanced literacy. The ongoing coaching became the vehicle for sustained, differentiated professional development to build capacity. At times, the principal initiated coaching for staff based on observations. In other instances, staff initiated professional development opportunities. These coaching opportunities were tailored to the needs of the teacher and the coaches designed and collaborated with teachers.

Grade level PLCs and staff meeting PLCs, another form of professional learning, offered time for staff to collaborate around a given subject. Topics ranged from looking at student data and determining intervention groups to creating individualized student plans for reading and math.

Professional development did not always proceed smoothly. Teacher frustration, resistance, and non-reflective coaching situations sometimes slowed progress toward the goal. The leaders of Binalo Elementary wrestled with these challenges and developed ways to not let these behaviors halt the progress.

Professional learning at Binalo Elementary centered around the goal of having a strong universal instruction and the leaders of Binalo sent clear messages of the expectations to the staff. The teachers were not left to figure it out on their own; they had leaders ready to assist and learn with them. By developing strong relationships, being present in the classrooms, providing feedback, and using student data, the leaders knew where teachers were at in their practice and systematically provided professional development at the building level, grade level, and individual level.

The leaders of Binalo Elementary wanted teachers to develop their own goals that they could then support. If a teacher seemed unable or unwilling to develop goals, however, the leadership stepped in and provided mechanisms to ensure they focused on improving their practice. Status quo was not an option. Leaders did not ask, “Do you want to improve your practice?” Instead the questions asked by leaders at Binalo Elementary were, “How do you want to improve your practice? with a follow-up of, “How can I help you achieve that goal?”

## Chapter VII: Findings, Discussion, and Implications

The question guiding this study is “*In high poverty schools with high levels of literacy achievement, what steps are taken by district and elementary school leaders to provide effective professional development for teachers?*”. As I analyzed the data four overarching themes emerged. Looking through the lens of these themes, the first section of this chapter compares and contrasts the three sites. In the next section I discuss the findings derived from the themes describing the steps taken by principals, teachers, and district level leaders in designing professional learning for staff. In the final section I present the implications for practice and research.

### **Comparison and Contrast of the Pago District Office, Niyoron Elementary, and Binalo Elementary**

**Leading and staying the course.** The overarching theme of leading and staying the course refers to the ways administrators and teachers provided leadership for their district and school site. Additionally, it refers to the ways the leaders planned for and followed a road map for sustained, ongoing professional development.

Figure 6

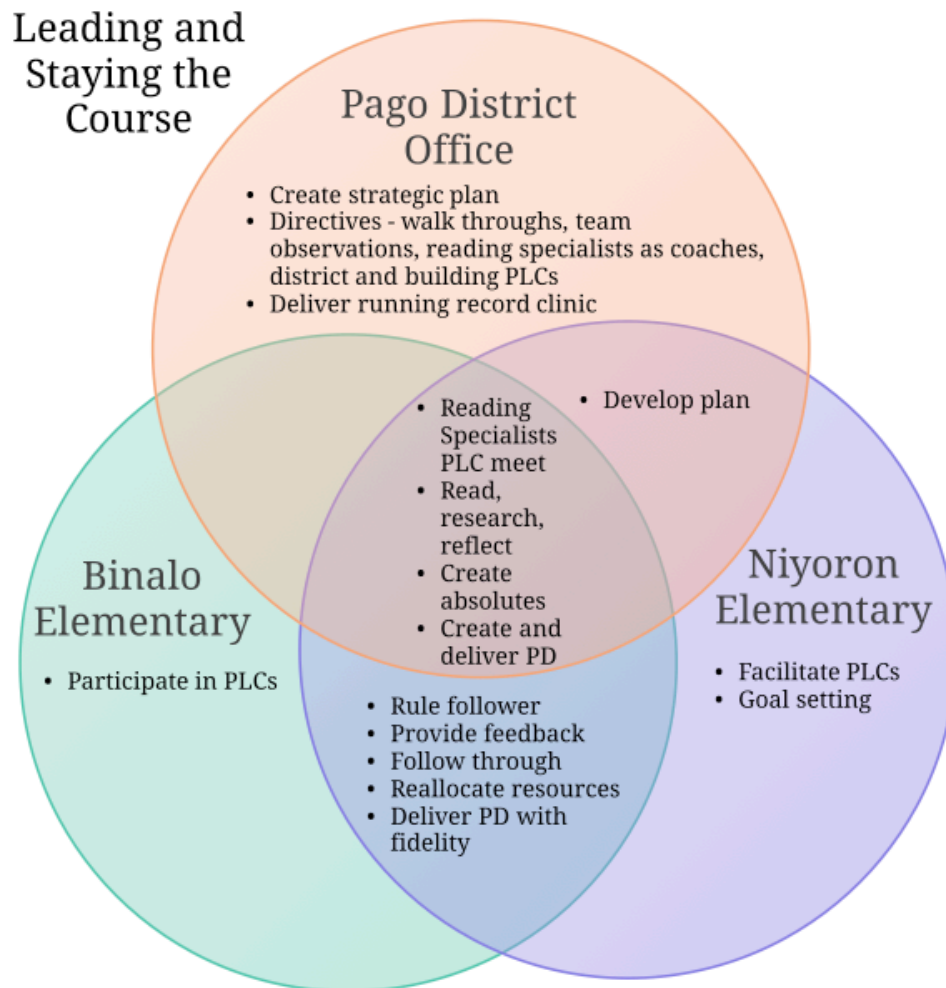


Figure 6 captures the similarities and differences in how the teachers and administrators led at their school or at the district office site. The district office is intentionally displayed at the top of the figure. The superintendent and assistant superintendent through the strategic plan and non-negotiable directives, provided the direction for both schools. The strategic plan articulated strategies and action steps focused on professional development for the universal and targeted areas of instruction, provided for additional time for PLCs, called for the development of an

observation form, and had staff members create growth plans in targeted areas -- one of which was literacy.

District non-negotiables included the principals conducting 20 walk throughs of every staff member and every teacher participating in a team observation. Beginning in the 2012-2013 school year, grade level teams met in grade level PLCs two times per week for 30 minutes. One PLC time focused on data and the other on curriculum. A directive to the reading specialists suspended interventions for 10 weeks, so as to provide professional development in the components of balanced literacy during the school day to every teacher of reading.

Ms. Warren, the district reading specialist, led the other reading specialists. Under the direction of the assistant superintendent, Ms. Warren relieved the reading specialists of their Friday afternoon responsibilities to meet with her. This team, referred to as the reading specialist PLC, read research and reflected on best practices in literacy. Collectively, they created position statements, or absolutes, that drove the creation of professional development. Throughout the year, the reading specialists delivered the professional development to staff at district-wide PLCs and at their own schools.

During the interviews, two areas surfaced at Niyoron Elementary that did not appear at the other sites. The first focused on goals. Ms. Wulft told each teacher they had to develop a goal in literacy. She set and met a goal for herself, too. In addition to the 20 walk throughs on each teacher, she completed one formal observation, and wrote a summative evaluation for each teacher. Together, Ms. Wulft and the teacher looked at the teacher's progress toward her goals.

The second difference focused on Ms. Wulft reaching out to Ms. Anders. Finding data showing an alarming number of students not at literacy benchmarks at a particular grade level,

Ms. Wulft sought help. She worked with Ms. Anders, Ms. Warren and Ms. Solt to develop a professional development plan to coach the teachers. This plan eventually evolved into the 10 week coaching plan.

Niyoron Elementary and Binalo Elementary led in similar ways, including: being a rule follower, following through on professional development, providing feedback, reallocating resources, and delivering the professional development with fidelity. Ms. Sawyer and Ms. Wulft, both self-described “rule followers,” followed through on the district directives. The principals addressed every directive in some capacity.

In reallocating resources and providing feedback, subtle differences existed. Ms. Sawyer reallocated resources to provide substitutes for team observations. Ms. Wulft reallocated resources to provide substitutes for extended grade level PLC meetings focused on student data. Ms. Sawyer and Ms. Wulft provided feedback through the walk throughs and team observations. Ms. Wulft, in the 2012-2013 school year, focused observations on the mini-lessons and guided reading lessons. She timed her observations to occur when the teacher taught in a goal area, allowing Ms. Wulft to provide the teacher specific feedback on progress toward her goals.

The two schools led by ensuring they delivered the professional development with fidelity. The principals assumed responsibility for ensuring professional development at the district-wide PLCs carried through at their school. The principals also ensured implementation of professional development occurred with fidelity in ongoing coaching and 10 week coaching. The reading specialists saw their role as delivering the content and strategies as intended.

Lastly, at both two school sites, the reading specialists had a role in PLCs. At Binalo Elementary, the reading specialists had an assigned grade level and attended the grade level PLC

meeting. At Niyoron Elementary, the reading specialist responsibilities included facilitating discussions, examining student data, articulating expectations, and reminding of upcoming deadlines.

In summary, the district office had a distinctly different, yet essential role in leading the district. Their road map provided the course for the buildings to follow. The two school sites led in ways more similar than different. Small differences existed in the details.

**Sustaining coherent and differentiated learning opportunities.** Chapters 4-6 described the overarching theme of sustaining coherent and differentiated professional learning opportunities, detailing the structure of professional learning and painting a clear picture of what it looked like at each site. It also described professional development that occurred over time, building on previous learning, focusing on data, and responding to staff needs. The chapters regarding the two schools and the district provided in-depth descriptions of how each site approached sustaining coherent and differentiated learning opportunities. This section will compare and contrast the sites.

Figure 7

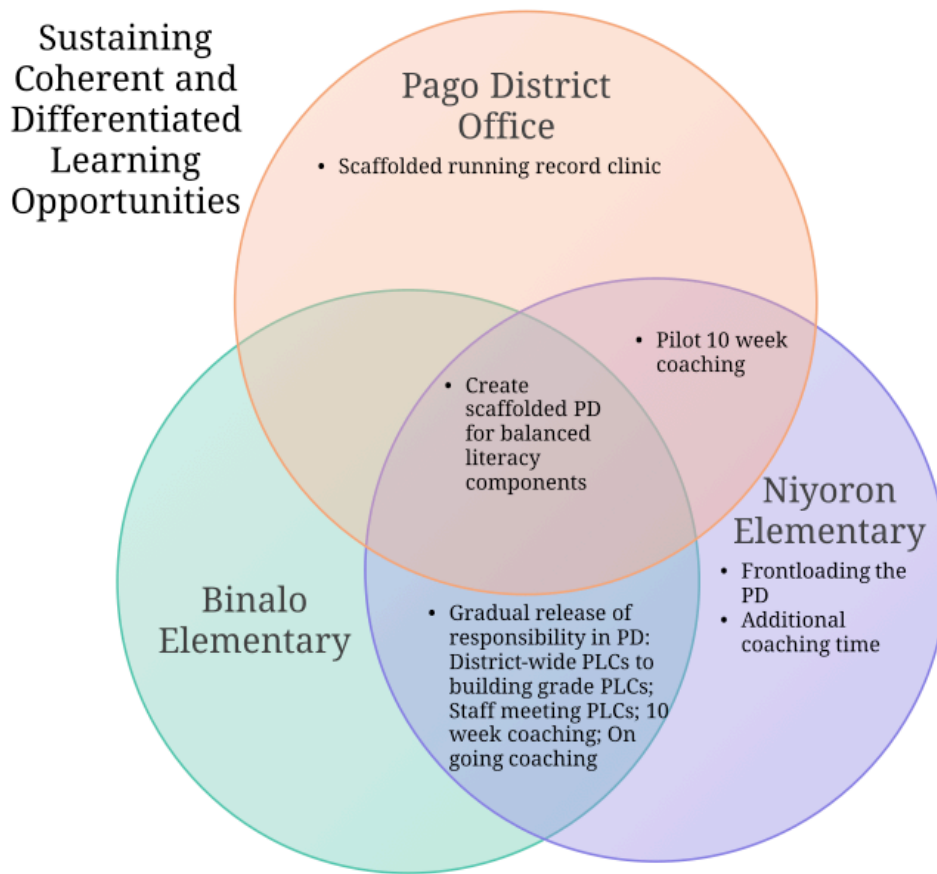


Figure 7 displays in broad strokes the similarities and differences amongst the sites. Beginning with the Pago District Office, Ms. Warren conducted the running record clinic yearly. The overlap of the district office, Niyoron Elementary, and Binalo Elementary represent the intersection where all reading specialists took what they learned from their research and created the professional development. Each professional development session built on learning from previous professional development sessions. Similar to the strategic plan providing a road map for the schools, the intersection of all three sites shows how the reading specialists built the framework for what the professional development looked like at the district-wide PLCs and the school sites.

The reading specialist PLC work is found in the overlap of Binalo Elementary and Niyoron Elementary. Both school sites used the gradual release of responsibility in professional development in the four components of balanced literacy: interactive read aloud, shared reading, guided reading, and independent reading. These four components formed the basis of professional development in the district-wide PLCs, building grade level PLCs, 10 week coaching plan, and ongoing coaching. District-wide PLCs occurred monthly while the grade level PLCs occurred two times per week for 30 minutes. The 10 week coaching plan occurred at the beginning of the year with ongoing coaching throughout the year.

At both schools, ongoing coaching could be initiated by the teacher or the principal. Ms. Sawyer and Ms. Wulft used observations to determine if a teacher needed coaching. Both principals communicated clearly with staff. If a teacher did not deliver instruction as intended, the principal told the teacher the reading specialist would coach her in a specific area. The principal then directed the reading specialist to follow through with coaching.

A subtle difference emerged from the analysis of interviews regarding ongoing coaching. At Niyoron Elementary, ongoing coaching centered on Ms. Solt coaching teachers upon teacher or principal request. At Binalo Elementary, on the other hand, in addition to the coaching by principal or teacher request, Ms. Brogen described two instances when she saw a coachable moment while observing a classroom and chose not to wait. Instead, Ms. Brogen joined in the instruction, became a co-instructor, and provided in-the-moment professional development.

Small differences also existed in how the reading specialists and principals differentiated the learning opportunities. The leaders tailored the learning opportunities to meet the teachers' needs. Staff meeting PLCs provided one example. Both principals used the once per month extended staff meeting time for professional development. Ms. Wulft conducted book study

groups, such as the book *Good to Great Teaching*. Ms. Sawyer noticed that writing individual student plans presented a challenge to the majority of her staff. To meet the needs of her teachers, she used staff exemplars and had the teachers collaborate with their peers to show their plans and assist colleagues with creating their student plans. Both used staff meeting time for professional development, though the principals differed on the topic based on staff needs.

Per the district directive, the grade level PLCs met twice a week for 30 minutes. Binalo Elementary and Niyoron Elementary used the time to focus on data and students' needs. The district level had created data binders that teachers brought to the meetings. Data were analyzed and teachers determined which students needed which type of instruction. Teachers decided who would teach the various groups. At Niyoron Elementary, once per month they extended the time and invited the special education teacher, the ESL teacher, grade level teachers, and Ms. Solt. They examined their data to determine effectiveness in their interventions and to determine new groupings.

The district-wide PLCs focused on guided reading and understanding the behaviors and understandings students need at each reading level in order for teachers to be able to tailor instruction. The reading specialists delivered this professional development to teachers. By scaffolding the learning from month-to-month the reading specialists built on previous learning. The learning opportunity required teachers to bring their student data to analyze as they learned about the behaviors and understandings. This allowed teachers to better understand their learners and then use the data to plan for instruction. In these sessions, the reading specialists used materials such as *The Continuum of Literacy Learning* by Fountas and Pinnell (2011) to assist teachers in understanding the levels and planning for instruction.

Following the district-wide PLC professional development, the principals ensured implementation occurred at their school. Ongoing coaching differentiated the learning for teachers who needed additional time and support. The reading specialists at each site had the responsibility for delivering ongoing coaching professional development.

One area was unique to Niyoron Elementary -- additional coaching. In the 2012-2013 school year, Ms. Wulft saw that a particular grade level had an unusually high number of students not at benchmark. She reallocated 90 minutes per day of Ms. Solt's time for her to coach teachers of that grade level.

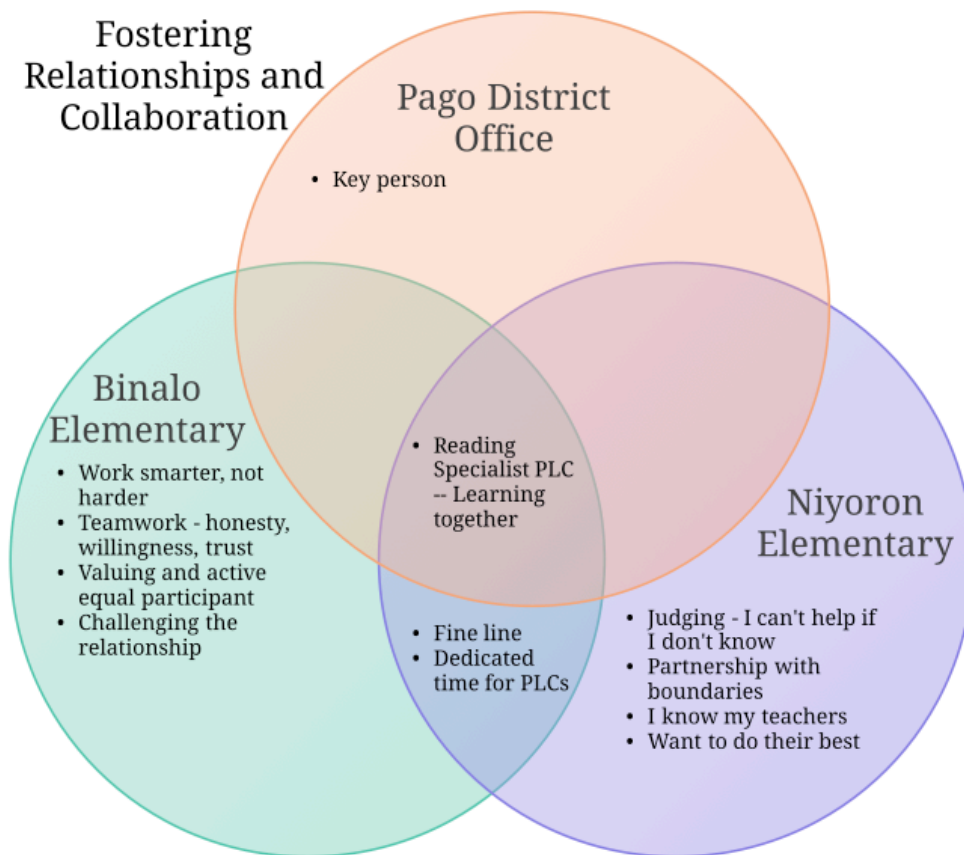
The overlap of Niyoron Elementary with the district office reflected the pilot 10 week coaching plan that Ms. Wulft, Ms. Solt, and Ms. Warren developed in 2011-2012 when they found a grade level with students not achieving at the expected levels. The three leaders developed a schedule, determined teachers' needs, and provided professional development with one grade level at Niyoron. The 10 week coaching pilot provided coaching in the classroom and outside the classroom with a goal of improving student learning.

In summary, the reading specialist PLC developed scaffolded professional development for the district-wide PLCs and the 10 week coaching plan. Principals assumed the responsibility for ensuring that the learning from the district-wide PLC occurred at their school. The building level reading specialists provided follow up support through ongoing coaching either by request or as a directive. At grade level PLCs, teachers analyzed data and developed intervention plans for all learners -- those above, at, and below grade level. Ms. Wulft added professional development for a team that struggled getting students to benchmark. Both school sites followed generally the same path. In the interviews, subtle differences emerged. Teachers, and the variety of experiences they brought to the classroom, played an important factor in why these two

schools differed in what otherwise appear to be very similar professional development opportunities for staff.

**Fostering relationships and collaboration.** The overarching theme of fostering relationships and collaboration refers to the intentional interactions and opportunities for staff to engage in discussions about instruction, data, assessment, and students. Of the four overarching themes, relationships had the most differences between the two schools.

Figure 8



***The district office and the reading specialist PLC.*** As the assistant superintendent, Ms. Anders worked closely with her reading specialist, Ms. Warren. Ms. Anders saw her as a key

person. Ms. Anders relied on her to build the capacity of the reading specialists and develop professional development for teachers. Ms. Warren expressed sentiments regarding a high degree of satisfaction working with Ms. Anders.

Ms. Warren fostered collaboration with the reading specialist PLC. Half a day each week she brought the reading specialists together to read research and reflect. As a team, they shifted from being 100% interventionists to 50% interventionists/50% coaches. They did not do this in isolation, rather they learned how to coach by learning together as a reading specialist PLC.

***Relationships at Niyoron Elementary.*** In 2010, the staffs from two schools combined. Ms. Wulft said it created tension at the school because everybody wanted to do things the way they used to. In addition, that same year, Ms. Wulft joined the Niyoron Elementary staff.

The teachers had not experienced routine visits by a principal. Ms. Wulft had made it her practice to be in the classrooms daily for about half the day. At one grade level PLC, Ms. Wulft faced teachers telling her they felt, “judged” every time she came in the room. She explained to the teachers, “I can’t help you as a leader, or a coach either, if I do not know what you are struggling with.”

Ms. Wulft and Ms. Solt worked together at a previous school and had established trust. Ms. Solt described Ms. Wulft as “very, very supportive” and they benefited from “a real partnership.” Ms. Solt did not think she could do her job if she didn’t have Ms. Wulft “on board with all this.” The partnership also had boundaries. Ms. Wulft respected the fact that coaching situations remained confidential.

Ms. Solt believes, “Everybody comes to work wanting to do their best.” She kept that in mind as she coached the teachers. In coaching situations, she knew her teachers and what type of support they wanted from her.

***Relationships at Binalo Elementary.*** As principal of Binalo Elementary for four years, Ms. Sawyer had more time with her staff. She looked for a “willingness to work” and she appreciated their honesty. She stressed “we need to work truly as a team” and if they struggled or needed help, she would help them. “Working smarter, not harder,” from DuFour, guided Ms. Sawyer. When she saw teachers struggling with writing student plans, she encouraged collaboration by having teachers with well developed plans share them with other teachers at a staff meeting PLC.

The reading specialists at Binalo Elementary built solid relationships with staff. Ms. Brogen said she valued what teachers already know and that understanding helped with participation and the willingness to try something new. The reading specialists and teachers shared the idea of “expert.” As coaches, they sent the messages that they were not the experts and that they learned alongside the teachers. Ms. Brogen viewed the relationship as the cornerstone of her work. If she developed a solid relationship with teachers, she believed, then teachers learning the strategies would follow. Ms. Frank built relationships by being an active and equal participant. She wanted teachers to see her working at least as hard as them. At times, relationships faced challenges. Ms. Brogen provided an example describing how she addressed the topic with the teacher, talked through it, and got back on solid ground.

***Commonalities between Niyoron and Binalo.*** During interviews with the reading specialists at both sites, the phrase “fine line” surfaced. As a coach, the reading specialists observed and provided feedback. This fine line between observing and giving feedback to a peer,

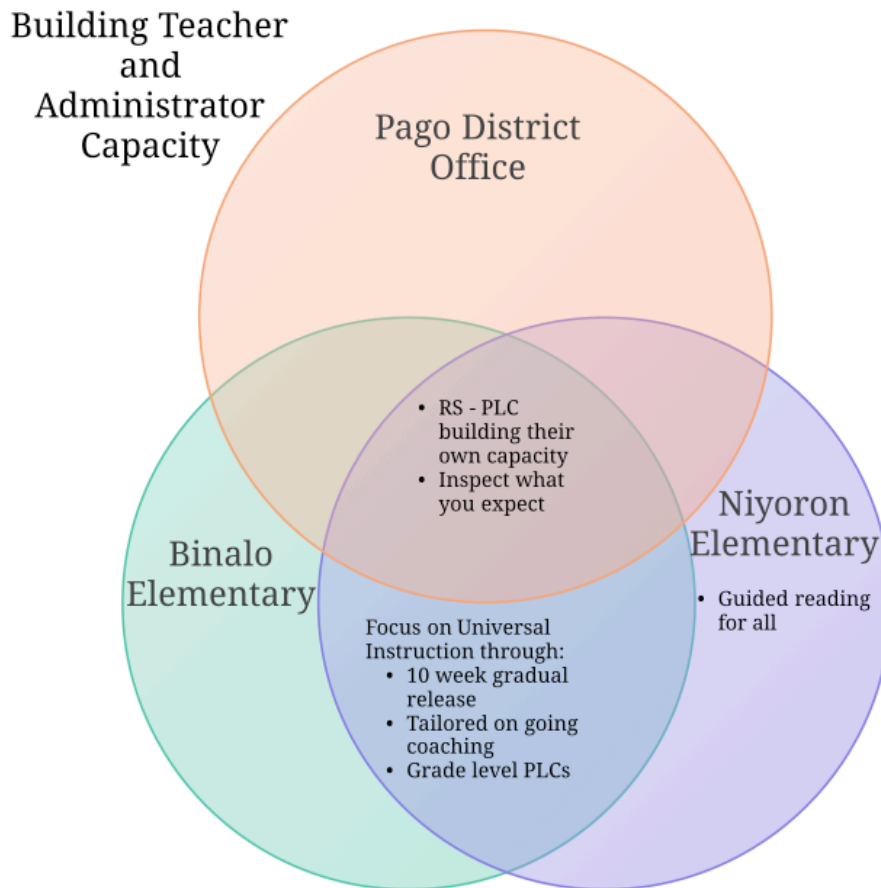
appeared to some like the reading specialists played a quasi-administrative role. The reading specialists made clear to their staff that summative evaluations rested with the principals -- their role was formative.

The purposeful dedication of time fostered collaboration. At both school sites, per the strategic plan, grade level PLCs met twice per week to focus on the data and curriculum. In addition, staff meeting time turned into a PLC where the staff collaborated around a specific topic.

**Summary.** The reading specialists under the supervision of Dr. Anders, acted as their own PLC and worked collectively to develop professional development, deepen their content knowledge, and develop strategies for coaching. Relationships at the two schools differed. Ms. Sawyer's time at Binalo was longer and relationships had more time to become established compared to Niyoron. Both school sites dedicated time for PLCs as times for collaboration. The reading specialists at both sites worked on building relationships with teachers but they recognized the fine line they walked giving formative feedback.

**Building Teacher and Administrator Capacity.** The overarching theme of building teacher and administrator capacity refers to knowledge, skills, and dispositions of teachers and principals growing as a result of professional learning opportunities.

Figure 9



Ms. Warren said, “You can’t inspect what you expect if you don’t know what it looks like.” This statement summarized a goal of Ms. Warren’s and the other reading specialists. They focused their work on building their capacity and that of the principals so they knew exactly what they should see in literacy instruction in the classroom. Evidence of this existed as early as the running record clinic where the reading specialists attended alongside teachers so the reading specialists could follow-up at their school sites. The reading specialists built administrator capacity by attending the monthly principal meetings and front loading literacy practices the teachers received during professional development.

The leaders -- teachers and principals -- at all three sites actively sought out professional learning experiences to build their capacity. In addition to the professional development provided by the district, the leaders pursued other types of learning in a variety of forms ranging from the reading of professional journals, to conferences and coursework.

Niyoron Elementary and Binalo Elementary had more similarities than differences in the ways they built the capacity of their staff. Teacher professional development opportunities included the same offerings: 10 week coaching, ongoing coaching, professional development district-wide PLCs, and running record clinic. Most of those, with the exception of ongoing coaching, had a set format with specific goals. All teachers of reading attended these trainings. Ongoing coaching provided tailored and differentiated professional development to build teachers' specific skills.

Similarities existed between the schools in how they built principal capacity. Ms. Wulft spent a considerable amount of time with reading specialists to learn as much as possible. Another opportunity existed where the reading specialist, sitting alongside a principal, coached the principal about what to look for while a teacher taught a lesson.

Both principals saw the universal instruction as the area where teachers needed to develop their skills. Ms. Sawyer summarized it as, "They can talk the talk, but they're not walking the walk." Walk throughs and observations informed the principals of who needed professional development and they sought ongoing coaching for their staff.

At both school sites, principals encouraged teachers to set their own goals. At Binalo Elementary leaders asked, "How do you want to increase your teacher capacity?" At Niyoron Elementary leaders asked, "What can we do to help . . . What do you need?"

One subtle difference between the schools arose from the interviews. At Niyoron Elementary, Ms. Wulft wanted to ensure her staff had the skills to run effective guided reading groups. In previous years, before Ms. Wulft became principal at Niyoron Elementary, some teachers had attended guided reading training. Ms. Wulft required guided reading training for all teachers at Niyoron Elementary, even if they had previously attended the training.

In summary, both schools had the same goal -- to help teachers acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to effectively teach literacy. At the district level the reading specialists developed the professional development. The teachers at both schools received professional development at the district level PLCs and at their school. Given that, it is not surprising to find many similarities, with some site specific differences in ongoing coaching based on teachers' needs.

## **Findings and Discussion**

A question guided this study: *“In high poverty schools with high levels of literacy achievement, what steps are taken by district and elementary school leaders to provide effective professional development for teachers?”*. Learning Forward’s seven standards of professional learning provided the framework for the literature review. The seven standards include leadership, learning communities, resources, data, learning designs, implementation, and outcomes. The seven standards for professional learning do not fit into tidy compartments as discrete stand alone pillars. They are interwoven and leaders integrate the standards as they plan for professional development for staff.

The three sites have been presented through four overarching themes: Leading and Staying the Course, Sustaining Coherent and Differentiated Learning Opportunities, Developing

Teacher and Administrator Capacity, and Fostering Relationships and Collaboration. The overarching themes evolved from the stories and artifacts shared by the district and elementary level leaders. By examining these overarching themes, steps emerged describing what the leaders did in providing professional development for staff.

The leaders took steps focused on:

- Delivering clear non-negotiable directives and aligning resources;
- Deepening reading specialists' content knowledge and developing their coaching strategies;
- Ensuring principals had the knowledge and skills to monitor and sustain effective literacy instruction at their school;
- Providing multiple forms of learning opportunities focused on universal literacy instruction to allow staff to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

In this section I present the findings and discuss their relationship to research.

Leadership is critical to student achievement. Leithwood, Patten, and Jantzi (2010) showed leadership is second only to classroom instruction in positively impacting student achievement. Before describing and discussing the steps, a definition of leadership provides a lens to think about the way the leaders approached and carried through with these steps.

Bredeson and Kelley (2010) defined distributed leadership as, "The collaborative work of principals and teacher leaders that creates the conditions, structures, processes and individual capacities to influence instructional designs and practices that effect student learning." This definition fits by those identified as leading in this study -- principals and teacher leaders working collaboratively at the school sites. The steps these leaders took focused on the action

words of this definition -- “creates the conditions, structures, processes, and individual capacities.” Lastly, the goals of the leaders in the Pago School District aligned with the latter half of this definition, “to influence instructional designs and practices that effect student learning.” In this chapter, the findings focus on the how leaders worked collaboratively to create the “conditions, structures, processes, and individual capacities.”

This definition does not necessarily fit for the district office administrators. They did not collaborate with staff the way the principals and teacher leaders did in this study. They created the conditions for distributed leadership by providing clear non-negotiable direction and aligning the resources allowing the principals and teacher leaders to work collaboratively.

**Delivering clear non-negotiable directives and aligning resources.** Learning Forward (2011) describes the leadership standard as “skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning” (p. 28). The superintendent, assistant superintendent, and principals advocated for professional learning and created the support systems by giving clear non-negotiable directives and then aligning resources to support those directives. Examples of the directives included: principals conducting 20 walk throughs of every staff member; every teacher participating in a team observation; monthly district-wide PLC meetings, grade level PLC meetings two times per week for 30 minutes focused on data and curriculum; all teachers participating in the 10 week coaching plan; and reading specialists suspending intervention time to do coaching.

An example of a significant structural change occurred when the reading specialists shifted from interventionist to coach. The assistant superintendent viewed interventions as reactive and coaching as proactive. Her belief guided her decision to reallocate the reading

specialists from 100% interventionists to 50% coach/50% interventionist. She said, “[T]hat's the only way we're going to change teachers.” With the reading specialists assuming 50% coaching responsibilities it made room for reading specialists to be working with teachers, not only students.

Most examples of directives came from the district level. Principals, however, delivered directives, too. Both principals identified themselves as “rule followers.” What the district level said they should do, they followed through with at their school. The principals also gave directives to their reading specialists to coach specific teachers on specific areas when they saw an area of need.

A trait that appears in many professional development models is the dedication of time and resources (Corcoran, 1995; American Federation of Teachers, 1996; U.S. Department of Education, 1997; Educational Research Service, 1998; Kennedy, 1998; Birman et.al., 2000; Kent & Lingman, 2000; Terzian, 2000; Wenglinisky, 2002; National Staff Development Council, 2001). The administrators aligned resources and dedicated time to support the directives. An example of this took place when the reading specialists’ responsibilities shifted. The assistant superintendent reallocated the reading specialists’ role from interventionist to coach and suspended their interventionist responsibilities during the 10 week coaching plan. An example of dedicated time occurred when the district level ensured time for district-wide PLCs and principals ensured time for grade level PLCs to meet twice per week. Resources provided principals with the tools they needed. They received iObservation, a web based application for observations, when they collected data from their walk throughs and observations and provided feedback to teachers.

**Deepening reading specialists' content knowledge and developing their coaching strategies.** The reading specialists had two goals for their professional development -- to deepen their content knowledge in literacy and to acquire strategies for coaching. To accomplish these goals, the reading specialists became a collaborative team that functioned as its own PLC. They worked together in a way research has identified a PLC works -- collectively in a cycle of inquiry, where they grappled with problems, took risks, and examined their practice in a safe environment (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Bryk, Camburn & Louis, 1999; Lieberman & Wood, 2002; Little, 1993).

The reading specialist PLC followed a process of reading research and reflecting on it. As they developed their knowledge base, they created position statements about best practices in literacy. Next, they created professional development for staff. The reading specialists delivered the professional development at monthly district-wide PLC meetings and in various formats at their school site.

By dedicating large amounts of time, the reading specialist PLC deepened their content knowledge and developed their coaching skills. The Pago School District leadership used the work place to build their reading specialists' capacity. Bredeson (2003) describes professional learning as occurring "in" work, "at" work, or "outside" of work. The time the reading specialist PLC spent focused on professional learning "at" work. During their PLC time, their work focused on collectively developing common understandings about best practices in literacy instruction and coaching principles. This occurred "at" work when weekly for half a day the PLC met during the work day.

**Ensuring principals had the knowledge and skills to monitor and sustain effective literacy instruction at their school.** The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards state that principals must supervise instruction and monitor and evaluate the instructional programs (Educational Leadership Policy Standards: ISLLC, 2008). It would be reasonable to infer that to do this effectively, principals need to know what best practices in literacy instruction look like in the classroom.

The district reading specialist, Ms. Warren, said, “You can’t inspect what you expect, if you don’t know what it looks like.” To ensure that the principals knew what instruction should look like, the reading specialists assumed the role of coaching the principal in what to look for during balanced literacy. Principals received this professional development formally and informally. Formal professional development occurred at monthly district principal meetings and as part of the 10 week coaching plan. During the 10 week coaching plan, principals received professional development while they observed the coaching sessions. While the teacher instructed, the principal observed alongside the coach. The coach assumed the role of instructing the principal in the balanced literacy components and they co-constructed what they saw during instruction. Informal professional development occurred during conversations between principal and coach at the school.

Marshall (2012) advocates that principals should conduct unannounced, frequent, short observations of teachers. He recommends providing feedback either in a face-to-face conversation or as a short write up. Principals in the Pago School District followed this protocol. They conducted 20 walk throughs on each teacher and provided feedback. To help them accomplish this task, they received training in how to use a web based tool called iObservation. They collected their notes in this application and shared it with teachers. The platform allowed

for discussions to occur through principals posing questions about what they observed and teachers responding. With the knowledge of what to look for in instruction, principals had the tools to communicate with staff about what they observed in the classroom. Based on their observations, the principals responded by putting resources where needed, such as assigning a teacher to have coaching on a particular component of balanced literacy.

**Providing multiple forms of learning opportunities focused on universal literacy instruction to allow staff to acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions.** All the previous steps form the foundation and contribute to the quality of the professional development. Reading specialists created the professional development and worked with the principals to develop a schedule for delivering it and supporting it over an extended period of time. The goal of all the professional development focused on developing the capacity of the teachers to deliver universal instruction to meet the needs of their students in the classroom. Principals and the reading specialists provided professional development through the 10 week coaching model, ongoing coaching, and PLCs -- district-wide and grade level.

The Pago School District focused on developing PLCs at the district level and school level. Several models identified a collaborative and a collegial work environment as a trait of highly effective professional development (Corcoran, 1995; Hawley & Valli, 1996; Loucks-Horsley et al, 1996; U.S. Dept. of Education, 1997; Birman et. al., 2000, Kent & Lingman , 2000; National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching, 2000; Terzian, 2000; Wenglinsky, 2002; National Staff Development Council, 2011).

District-wide PLCs met monthly and the reading specialists provided the professional development to staff. This ensured consistent professional development across all buildings in

the district. Responsibility for following through to ensure that the practices learned at the district-wide PLCs occurred in the classrooms rested with the building principal. Principals provided feedback to staff as they conducted walk throughs and team observations to determine if implementation occurred with fidelity. If not, Ms. Wulft and Ms. Sawyer relied on their reading specialists to coach the teachers.

Saunders, Goldenburg, and Gallimore (2009) found a link between PLCs and positive results in student achievement. They found that teams with positive results met two to three times per month between 45-50 minutes and focused their work on curriculum, instruction, and the needs of their students. The Pago School District adopted a similar format in their PLCs. Monthly district-wide PLCs met and participated in professional development focused on literacy anywhere between 30-90 minutes. Grade level PLCs met two times per week for 30 minutes each and focused their work on curriculum, instruction, and data analysis.

Guskey (2003) described collaboration as the team working together, sharing ideas, strategies, and expertise. At both schools, the principals and readings specialists attended and facilitated the grade level PLCs. Each week grade level PLCs focused one of their PLCs on data. Learning Forward (2011) identified data as the starting point in the continuous improvement cycle (See Figure 1). The use of data is supported as an essential trait in models of highly effective professional development (Hawley & Valli, 1996; Educational Research Service, 1998; Kent & Lingman, 2000; National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching, 2000). Grade level PLCs collaborated by analyzing student data and looking at curriculum. Based on their discussions, teams decided on interventions for all students -- those who had not met targets, met targets, or exceeded targets.

As previously mentioned, the trait of having collegial work environment appeared in several models of highly effective professional development (Corcoran, 1995; Hawley & Valli, 1996; Loucks-Horsley et al, 1996; U.S. Dept. of Education, 1997; Birman et. al., 2000, Kent & Lingman , 2000; National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching, 2000; Terzian, 2000; Wenglinsky, 2002; National Staff Development Council, 2011). The reading specialists at both schools described the necessity of establishing trust with their teachers. They fostered trust through valuing teachers' previous experiences and knowledge, being an active participant and equal participant, knowing what their teachers want, and keeping coaching conversations confidential.

The 10 week coaching plan provided professional development in the area of balanced literacy for all teachers of reading. Teachers worked with the coach using the Pearson and Gallagher model (1983) of gradual release of responsibility to hone their instructional strategies. The model consisted of following the "I do, We do, You do" format where the coach modeled and the teacher watched and a follow-up conversation occurred. In the next phase, the coach and teacher co-taught a lesson and had a follow-up conversation. In the last stage, the teacher taught a lesson and the coach provided feedback. Together they reflected on the lesson. This type of learning required active learning of both participants as they navigated the learning experience, a necessary element found in the Eisenhower study (Penuel et. al., 2007).

Griffith, Kimmel, and Biscoe (2010) found benefits of sustained professional learning through coaching. Ongoing coaching, by design, builds on previous learning, differentiates for the learner's needs, and can be sustained as long as it is needed. The Pago School District provided professional learning opportunities, often embedded in the school day. Bredeson (2003)

describes this type of learning as “in” work -- it is professional development and learning occurring while the teacher is teaching, co-teaching, or watching a colleague teach. Teachers requested support or a principal assigned a coach to a teacher if she observed a need. Coaches tailored their professional development to the teacher’s need and provided feedback. This form of professional development also followed the gradual release of responsibility model by Pearson and Gallagher (1983). Garet et. al. (2001) found that in this type of learning situation the teacher is an active learner -- a core feature of effective professional development.

**Summary.** Four steps identify how leaders of the Pago School District led their staff, provided sustained and differentiated professional development, and fostered collaboration and relationships to build the capacity of principals and teachers. First, the superintendent, assistant superintendent, and the principals delivered clear non-negotiable directives and then aligned resources to support the directives. The district leaders played a central role in planning for and supporting district-wide and school level professional development. Second, reading specialists’ deepened their content knowledge about best practices in literacy and developed their coaching strategies. With clear direction from the assistant superintendent, the district reading specialist led the reading specialist PLC. Third, principals developed their knowledge and skills to monitor and sustain effective literacy instruction at their school. The reading specialists worked with principals to develop their understanding of balanced literacy, allowing principals to know what to look for in their walk throughs and team observations. Lastly, the reading specialists worked with the principals to provide multiple forms of learning opportunities, focused on universal literacy instruction with a goal of staff acquiring the knowledge and skills to meet their students’

needs. Teachers participated in a variety of types of professional development from district-wide PLCs -- to grade level PLCs -- to 10 week coaching -- to ongoing coaching.

### **Implications for Practice and Research**

This section focuses on implications for practice and research. Implications for practice may inform those in the field -- district leaders, principals, and teacher leaders. Implications for research describes topics that arose from this case study and may warrant further research.

**Implications for practice.** This study focused on the steps taken by district leaders and elementary school leaders in providing professional development focused on literacy practices for staff. Practitioners may want to consider how this district approached professional development as a resource as they think about professional development in their own district and school site.

The Pago School District leaders established non-negotiable directives and communicated them clearly to staff. The superintendent and assistant superintendent provided clear direction regarding expectations for collaboration in district-wide and building PLCs, participation in several forms of professional development, and the duties the reading specialists assumed.

Participation in professional development in literacy best practices extended beyond classroom walls. Principals, reading specialists, and classroom teachers all attended some form of professional development targeted at developing their knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

The reading specialists had three roles in professional development -- they received it, developed it, and delivered it. Under the district reading specialist's leadership, the building reading specialists formed a reading specialist PLC that met weekly for half a day to develop their skills in coaching and deepening their content knowledge in the latest research in literacy practices. This team, functioning collectively as a professional learning community, read research, reflected, and created position statements about best practices in literacy. From their learning, they created and delivered professional development for staff at district-wide PLCs, with follow-up professional development at the school site.

Classroom teachers received multiple forms of professional development. Monthly district-wide PLCs met, and the reading specialists delivered the professional development. The learning from this time carried through to the school sites. Teachers continued their learning through grade level PLCs, ongoing coaching, and a 10 week coaching plan.

The 10 week coaching plan, developed by the reading specialists, focused on the balanced literacy components. In this model every teacher of reading received professional development using the gradual release of responsibility model. Ahead of a coaching session, teachers received articles to read and later discuss at the grade level PLC meetings. Following this discussion, the coach modeled an instructional strategy while the teacher watched. The teacher and reading specialist reflected on the lesson. In the next phase, the teacher and coach co-taught a lesson and together reflected on it. Lastly, the teacher taught a lesson on her own and the coach watched the lesson and provided feedback. Together they reflected on the lesson.

The reading specialists' responsibilities included 50% of their time coaching. Ongoing coaching occurred at grade level PLC meetings or one-on-one by a teacher request or the

principal request. Ongoing coaching focused on specific needs of a teacher, allowing highly differentiated coaching that was responsive to the teacher's needs.

Principals ensured that they had the skills and knowledge to observe staff on instruction, and then to, evaluate and provide feedback. The reading specialists delivered the professional development, both formally and informally. Formally, they delivered professional development at monthly district principal meetings by frontloading what the teachers would be learning at the district-wide PLCs. The principals built their skills about the components during the 10 week coaching plan, too. The principals watched a lesson of a teacher who taught the strategy with fidelity. The coach sat next to the principal throughout the lesson and identified areas of exemplary strategies and practices. The coach helped the principal to discern what best practice looked like in the classroom, to assist her when she visited other classrooms. Informally, reading specialists worked with their principals at school sharing the "look fors" of the literacy strategies.

The principals recognized their role in ensuring that implementation of the practices learned at the district-wide PLCs occurred at their school site. The principals used walk throughs and team observations to check progress. If the principals saw practices not being implemented as intended, the principals informed the teachers that the reading specialist would be coming to coach the teacher on an identified area.

Reading specialists identified the importance of building trust with their teachers. They developed it through valuing what the teachers know, being an active and equal participant, being responsive to their needs, assuming teachers to be well intentioned, and maintaining the confidentiality of coaching sessions.

### **Implications for Research**

Limitations of this study open the door for future research. The sample size is small, this case study focused on one district and two school sites. Participants included district level leaders and elementary school leaders. It is a snapshot of professional development at this district through the eyes of the leaders, and research did not extend over a long period of time. Further research may confirm or disconfirm the findings of this research.

Additional questions arose out of this research and may be worthy of research. Questions include (1) In a cross-section of districts with high levels of literacy achievement, what steps are taken by district level leaders to organize, develop, and provide professional development? (2) In what ways does coaching contribute to a positive effect on student achievement data where teachers have participated in 10 week coaching plan and ongoing coaching? (3) How are principals building their capacity to monitor and evaluate instruction in a classroom to determine if it is aligned with best practices?

*In a cross-section of districts with high levels of literacy achievement what steps are taken by district level leaders to organize, develop, and provide professional development?* In this case study, the district level leaders played a key role in organizing, developing, and providing professional development in all areas. By examining multiple high achieving districts, it may inform whether a centralized district role is critical in professional development in particular schools.

*In what ways does coaching contribute to a positive effect on student achievement data where teachers have participated in 10 week coaching plan and ongoing coaching?* The Pago School District developed the 10 week coaching plan. It acted as universal professional development for all teachers. The ongoing coaching acted as a differentiated professional

development opportunity responsive to and tailored to a particular set of teachers or an individual teacher. The further study of this type of model in schools with high student achievement, may help those in the field plan how and where to use their limited resources to impact student achievement.

*How are principals building their capacity to monitor and evaluate instruction in a classroom to determine if it is aligned with best practices?* The Pago School District ensured the principals knew effective instructional practices as they observed their staff. There is a great deal of research on principals being instructional leaders. Only limited research, however, has been conducted on how principals acquire the knowledge about best instructional practices.

## **Conclusion**

This study focused on the steps taken by district and elementary level leaders in providing professional development for staff. Leaders in this study included the assistant superintendent, principals, reading specialists, and one classroom teacher leader. The leadership demonstrated by these individuals was the key that opened the door allowing them to take steps toward creating and delivering highly effective professional development in the Pago School District.

The district administrators clearly defined and articulated a path that flowed to the school level. Reading specialists and administrators led by building the capacity of teachers and principals through differentiated and sustained professional development. The delivery of professional development occurred in various ways -- at collaborative district-wide PLCs and building grade level PLCs, during a 10 week coaching model, and through ongoing coaching.

The leaders of the Pago School District took steps toward providing professional development for staff. First, the superintendent and assistant superintendent delivered clear non-negotiable directives regarding reading specialists' coaching responsibilities, principals' responsibilities to be observing classrooms, and the expectations for collaboration at PLCs at the district-wide meetings and at the building level.

The reading specialists had sufficient time to develop deep content knowledge and coaching strategies. This team met for half a day weekly and formed their own type of PLC where they collaborated to learn coaching strategies and to research best practice in literacy. The reading specialist PLC read research, reflected, and created position statements. From this collaborative work, the reading specialists developed the professional development for staff at the district-wide PLCs and at the school site. Reading specialists led the professional development in all these areas.

Principals worked with their reading specialists to ensure they knew what the balanced literacy framework looked like when implemented with fidelity. This professional development occurred at monthly district principal meetings, during the 10 week coaching model, and through informal discussions. The principals followed through at their school by ensuring teachers implemented the practices with fidelity that they had learned at the district-wide PLC meetings.

All the steps supported and made possible the last step -- a highly effective professional development opportunity for staff. In this last step, the district provided multiple, differentiated opportunities for staff to acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions. All teachers of reading received monthly professional development at the district-wide PLC with followed-up professional development through ongoing coaching. Teachers by choice, or the principal as a directive, could initiate a coaching session. In addition, a 10 week coaching model had every

teacher of reading participate in a gradual release of responsibility model to ensure implementation of the balanced literacy components with fidelity.

The leaders -- from the superintendent, to building principals, to teacher leaders -- developed a systemic approach to professional development of the universal instruction with a focus on a vision of students achieving at high levels in the classroom. The steps they took toward this vision focused on articulating expectations and aligning resources, building the capacity of the leaders, and delivering a cohesive plan for professional development for teachers of reading based on learning through professional learning communities and job embedded coaching opportunities. How can one describe the steps taken by the leaders in providing professional development in the Pago School District?

Clearly articulated expectations. Dedicated resources. Research-driven content and practices. Goal-oriented. Focused. Multiple forms. Tailored to teachers' and principals' needs.

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## **Appendices**

Appendix A - Crosswalk of 2011 and 2001 Standards for Staff Development

Appendix B – Proposed Amendments to Section 9101 (34) of the Elementary and Secondary  
Education Act as reauthorized by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001

Appendix C - University of Wisconsin - Madison, Institutional Review Board Consent Form

Appendix D – Interview Protocol for District Leader

Appendix E – Interview Protocol for Teacher Leader

## Appendix A

### Crosswalk of 2011 and 2001 Standards for Staff Development

Retrieved from <http://www.learningforward.org/standards/crosswalk.pdf> on December 4, 2011

## Crosswalk WITH PREVIOUS STANDARDS

2011 Standards for Professional Learning	2001 Standards for Staff Development
<p><b>LEARNING COMMUNITIES:</b> Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students occurs within learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment.</p>	<p><b>LEARNING COMMUNITIES:</b> Staff development that improves the learning of all students organizes adults into learning communities whose goals are aligned with those of the school and district.</p> <p><b>COLLABORATION:</b> Staff development that improves the learning of all students provides educators with the knowledge and skills to collaborate.</p>
<p><b>LEADERSHIP:</b> Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning.</p>	<p><b>LEADERSHIP:</b> Staff development that improves the learning of all students requires skillful school and district leaders who guide continuous instructional improvement.</p>
<p><b>RESOURCES:</b> Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning.</p>	<p><b>RESOURCES:</b> Staff development that improves the learning of all students requires resources to support adult learning and collaboration.</p>
<p><b>DATA:</b> Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students uses a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning.</p>	<p><b>DATA-DRIVEN:</b> Staff development that improves the learning of all students uses disaggregated student data to determine adult learning priorities, monitor progress, and help sustain continuous improvement.</p> <p><b>EVALUATION:</b> Staff development that improves the learning of all students uses multiple sources of information to guide improvement and demonstrate its impact.</p>

2011 Standards for Professional Learning	2001 Standards for Staff Development
<p><b>LEARNING DESIGNS:</b> Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students integrates theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes.</p>	<p><b>DESIGN:</b> Staff development that improves the learning of all students uses learning strategies appropriate to the intended goal.</p> <p><b>RESEARCH-BASED:</b> Staff development that improves the learning of all students prepares educators to apply research to decision making.</p>
<p><b>IMPLEMENTATION:</b> Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students applies research on change and sustains support for implementation of professional learning for long-term change.</p>	<p><b>LEARNING:</b> Staff development that improves the learning of all students applies knowledge about human learning and change.</p>
<p><b>OUTCOMES:</b> Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards.</p>	<p><b>EQUITY:</b> Staff development that improves the learning of all students prepares educators to understand and appreciate all students, create safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments, and hold high expectations for their academic achievement.</p> <p><b>QUALITY TEACHING:</b> Staff development that improves the learning of all students deepens educators' content knowledge, provides them with research-based instructional strategies to assist students in meeting rigorous academic standards, and prepares them to use various types of classroom assessments appropriately.</p> <p><b>FAMILY INVOLVEMENT:</b> Staff development that improves the learning of all students provides educators with knowledge and skills to involve families and other stakeholders appropriately.</p>

## Appendix B

Proposed Amendments to Section 9101 (34) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act as reauthorized by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001

(34) PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT— The term “professional development” means a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving teachers’ and principals’ effectiveness in raising student achievement --

(A) Professional development fosters collective responsibility for improved student performance and must be comprised of professional learning that:

(1) is aligned with rigorous state student academic achievement standards as well as related local educational agency and school improvement goals;

(2) is conducted among educators at the school and facilitated by well-prepared school principals and/or school-based professional development coaches, mentors, master teachers, or other teacher leaders;

(3) primarily occurs several times per week among established teams of teachers, principals, and other instructional staff members where the teams of educators engage in a continuous cycle of improvement that —

(i) evaluates student, teacher, and school learning needs through a thorough review of data on teacher and student performance;

(ii) defines a clear set of educator learning goals based on the rigorous analysis of the data;

(iii) achieves the educator learning goals identified in subsection (A)(3)(ii) by implementing coherent, sustained, and evidenced-based learning strategies, such as lesson study and the development of formative assessments, that improve instructional effectiveness and student achievement;

(iv) provides job-embedded coaching or other forms of assistance to support the transfer of new knowledge and skills to the classroom;

(v) regularly assesses the effectiveness of the professional development in achieving identified learning goals, improving teaching, and assisting all students in meeting challenging state academic achievement standards;

(vi) informs ongoing improvements in teaching and student learning; and

(vii) that may be supported by external assistance.

(B) The process outlined in (A) may be supported by activities such as courses, workshops, institutes, networks, and conferences that:

(1) must address the learning goals and objectives established for professional development by educators at the school level;

(2) advance the ongoing school-based professional development; and

(3) are provided by for-profit and nonprofit entities outside the school such as universities, education service agencies, technical assistance providers, networks of content-area specialists, and other education organizations and associations.

Learning Forward Professional Development Definition retrieved from <http://www.learningforward.org/standfor/definition.cfm> on December 4, 2011

## Appendix C

### UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

#### Research Participant Information and Consent Form

**Title of the Study:** What Leaders Focus on in Professional Learning for Their Staff

**Principal Investigator:** Clifton F. Conrad, Ph.D. (phone: 608-843-6910) (email: [conrad@education.wisc.edu](mailto:conrad@education.wisc.edu))

Student Researcher: Heather Sveom (phone: 608-212-8290)

#### **DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH**

You are invited to participate in a research study about what leaders do to provide professional learning for their teaching staff.

You have been asked to participate because of your leadership position in the district during a time when there was evidence of high levels of achievement in reading for all students, including those identified as low socio-economic status.

The purpose of the research is to identify what leaders do to provide effective professional learning opportunities for their staff in high poverty schools with high levels of literacy achievement.

This study will include two district level administrators (Superintendent or Assistant Superintendent and Director of Instruction), two building level administrators (principal or assistant principal), and at least one teacher leader from each identified building.

The research will take place in an urban school district at the site where the subjects work. This will include the district office for the district administrators and the school building where the principal or assistant principal and identified teacher leader(s) work.

Audio tapes will be made of your participation.

Interviews will be conducted at the school district site as determined by the participants. Digital audiotapes will be made of your participation and secured on a password protected file. The digital audiotapes will be transcribed and the digital transcripts will be secured on a password protected file. The only individuals with access to the files will be the student investigator, faculty investigator, and the professional transcriber. The tapes will be kept for seven years before they are destroyed.

#### **WHAT WILL MY PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?**

If you decide to participate in this research you will be asked to participate in an interview ranging from one to two hours, and possibly a brief follow-up interview via telephone or email. Before the dissertation is submitted for its final review, you will be given an opportunity to review the content of the interview. Your participation will be one session with a possibility of a follow-up session. In total, your time including the interview, follow-up interviews, and content review may take up to a total of two hours.

**ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO ME?**

This study will identify the actions leaders took in providing professional learning opportunities for their staff and some sensitive information might be shared. There are some risks with sharing of sensitive material that should be acknowledged. Privacy and confidentiality are a priority and as such, safeguards such as the use of pseudonyms will be used. In addition, only the researcher, transcriber, and faculty adviser will have access to the digital audio recordings and you will have an opportunity to review content before the dissertation is submitted. There is a risk of confidentiality breach in that the District administrator(s) and/or principals in the schools may be able to determine who participated in the study since they are identifying specific school sites and staff.

**ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO ME?**

There are no direct benefits to you as a participant. However, you will be contributing to the field of education research regarding professional development practices in schools of high poverty. In addition, it may be a reflective tool for you to look at your district's achievements in reading for all students.

**HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?**

While there will probably 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 you leave today you should contact the Principal Investigator Clifton F. Conrad, Ph.D. at 608-843-6910. You may also call the student researcher, Heather Sveom at 608-212-8290.

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 Research and Social & Behavioral Science IRB Office at 608-263-2320.

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you begin participation and change your mind you may end your participation at any time without penalty.

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.

## Appendix D

### Interview Protocol for District Level Leaders

Interviewee:

District Level Leader Position:

School District:

Interviewer:

Time of Interview:

Date of Interview:

Place of Interview:

Introduction:

Thank you for taking the time today to meet with me and share your experiences. As part of my work on my dissertation, I would like to ask you a few questions about professional development in the area of reading.

Questions:

1. Can you share your educational positions including how long and in what capacity you have worked in this district?
2. Can you share a time when you thought the professional development experience went exceptionally well?
3. When you think about a successful professional development experience, what planning occurred before that day?
4. Can you describe how you work with people to design and deliver professional development?
5. Is there anything else you would like to add or explain in more detail?
6. Do you have any questions for me?

Thank interviewee for his/her time and reiterate confidentiality. Follow-up with mention of potential of additional interview in the future.

## Appendix E

### Interview Protocol Teacher Leaders

Interviewee:

Teacher Leader Position:

School District:

Interviewer:

Time of Interview:

Date of Interview:

Place of Interview:

#### Introduction:

Thank you for taking the time today to meet with me and share your experiences. As part of my work on my dissertation, I would like to ask you a few questions about professional development in the area of reading.

#### Questions:

1. Can you share your educational experiences including how long and in what capacity you have worked in this district?
2. When you think about the most beneficial professional development, can you share a time when you thought the professional development experience went exceptionally well?
3. Can you describe why you think it was so beneficial? What about the experience made you feel that it was highly successful?
4. As you work with other teachers and teacher leaders, what do you think is the most important thing about designing your professional learning?
5. As you work with administrators around professional development, what have been important pieces in making it effective professional development?
6. Is there anything else you would like to add or explain in more detail?
7. Do you have any questions for me?

Thank interviewee for his/her time and reiterate confidentiality. Follow-up with mention of potential of additional interview in the future.