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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

SUPPORTING DIVERSE LEARNERS THROUGH
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR TEACHERS

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

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College of Education and Behavioral Sciences
Department of Leadership, Policy and Development:
Higher Education and P-12 Education
Educational Leadership & Policy Studies (P-12)

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This Dissertation by: Ashley Newman Winnen

Entitled: *Supporting Diverse Learners Through Professional Learning for Teachers*

has been approved as meeting the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education in College of Education and Behavioral Sciences in Department of Leadership, Policy, and Development: Higher Education and P-12 Education, Program of Educational Leadership & Policy Studies (P-12)

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ABSTRACT

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School leaders use professional learning practices as a strategy to improve teaching and therefore student learning. As student populations become more ethnically and socioeconomically diverse, teachers need ongoing training to meet the needs of today's students. One successful elementary school in Colorado was the focus of this case study designed to identify the professional learning practices of a school with a record of closing the achievement gap with a high Latino population and a high percentage of students living in poverty. It was found that professional learning is strongly rooted in the culture and structures of Owl Crest Elementary School (pseudonym), is guided by strong leadership, and the content is aligned to meet the needs of the teachers and students of the school. Implications of the research include: Professional learning programs require strong and supportive leadership, schools benefit from the flexibility to design a program to meet the needs of teachers and students, and there must be an investment in resources to maintain effective programs.

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that truly cares about kids and wants to see them be successful. You have reinforced and reminded me why I am passionate about my topic. Thank you!

For Tricia and Liam

Dream big, and may you always have
the opportunity to achieve your goals.

“It’s more exciting to me now than it was 20 years ago because
of professional development.” – *Isadora*”

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		
I.	INTRODUCTION	1
	The Case for Professional Learning	
	Problem Identification	
	Purpose of the Study	
	Nature of the Study	
	Research Questions	
	Defining the Terms	
	Conclusion	
II.	A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	11
	Adult Learning	
	Learning Organizations	
	History of Professional Learning	
	Purpose of Professional Learning	
	Impact of Professional Learning	
	Professional Learning Policies	
	Characteristics of Effective Professional Learning	
	Professional Learning Communities	
	Structures of Professional Learning	
	Funding of Professional Learning Resources	
	Evaluating Professional Learning	
	Potential Barriers	
	Implementation in Colorado	
	The Achievement Gap in Colorado	
	Gap in the Literature	
	Conclusion	

CHAPTER		
III.	METHODOLOGY	44
	Research Questions	
	Research Process	
	Setting	
	Participants	
	Data Collection	
	Data Analysis	
	Trustworthiness	
	Researcher Perspective	
	Conclusion	
IV.	FINDINGS	63
	Participant Profiles	
	The Importance of Quality Leadership	
	Embedded Professional Learning in a Learning Organization	
	A Focus on the Community	
	Answering the Research Questions	
	Conclusion	
V.	CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	94
	Connecting the Findings to the Literature	
	Implications	
	Recommendations to Leaders	
	Limitations of the Study	
	Recommendations for Future Research	
	Researcher’s Reflections	
	Conclusion	
REFERENCES	109

APPENDIX

A	INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL	121
B	CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH	124
C	CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEW PORTION OF RESEARCH ..	127
D	INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	130
E	OBSERVATIONAL PROTOCOL	132
F	DOCUMENT ANALYSIS TEMPLATE	134

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE

1.	Characteristics of Effective Professional Learning	25
2.	Interview Participants and Owl Crest Elementary School	65
3.	Characteristics of Effective Professional Learning Present at Owl Crest Elementary School	86

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Beginning in the year 2000 and taking place every three years since, 15-year-old students around the world participate in the Program of International Student Assessment (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015b). As one of three international tests given to students, the Program of International Student Assessment has, in part, brought awareness to how countries' educational programs compare to each other, creating a heightened sense of competition between global rivals (Fuchs & Wößmann, 2006). News articles and documentary films, such as *Waiting for "Superman,"* as well as corporate executives, scholars, and politicians, have proclaimed America's educational system is failing, and these claims have been supported by international assessment results (Birtel & Chilcott [Producers] & Guggenheim [Director]), 2010; Reutzel & Clark, 2014). Lacking other options that are as easy to understand, citizens of the United States now look to these test scores as the acceptable measure of educational quality (Zhao, 2009). However, authors such as Barkan (2011) argued that the results are inaccurately used to fuel political fires when, in actuality, students in the United States are performing along with their international peers when controlling for socioeconomic factors. The difference in Barkan's (2011) view was that the United States strives to educate all students, including those in poverty, and students at schools in the United States with a low poverty rate outperform their

international peers. Either way, these international assessments are now a part of the debate about the quality of education in the United States (Hargreaves, 2014).

Students in the United States participate in the National Assessment of Educational Progress in addition to the Program of International Student Assessment (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015a). The National Assessment of Educational Progress began in 1969 and is administered every two years to students ages 9, 13, and 17 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015a). The Nation's Report Card chronicles levels of education across the United States based on National Assessment of Educational Progress scores (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015a). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 outlined the requirements of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, creating consistency through the design, requiring state and local participation, and allowing for public access to information (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015a). Those interested are able to analyze the results and compare those results from one testing year to the next, allowing them to determine if the education level of students has decreased, remained the same, or improved (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015a). Student scores have shown little growth on the National Assessment of Educational Progress over the years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015a).

The Case for Professional Learning

Since teachers have a role in student learning and teacher quality has the largest impact on student achievement, an analysis of student performance leads to a dialogue on teacher performance (Hargreaves, 2014). "Meeting the new demands of standards-based reform will mean schools must not only change [the] approach to student learning, but teacher learning" (Gulamhussein, 2013, p. 5). National

discussions about teacher learning and quality are evident, originally through the passing of the Title II Dwight D. Eisenhower Professional Development Program, a component within the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 (U.S. Department of Education, 1996a). The Elementary and Secondary Education Act made education for all students, especially those in impoverished communities, a top priority of the federal government (Darling-Hammond, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2013). This focus continued within legislation such as The No Child Left Behind Act, which required a higher level of accountability for states and measured adequate yearly progress (Zhao, 2009).

Beginning in 2009, the competitive grant Race to the Top was introduced, and states were eligible to apply if they met certain requirements, including a focus on educator effectiveness with teacher evaluation programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). The potential of millions of dollars of education funding lured states, including Colorado, to make changes to legislation (The New Teacher Project, 2010). Colorado was a winner in the 2011 third round and awarded \$17.9 million, split between the state and school districts, to develop the state standards and aligned assessments; implement a thorough teacher and principal evaluation system; increase science, technology, education, and math skills in all content areas; and build capacity for implementing the new state initiatives (Colorado Department of Education, 2015b).

In 2015, Congress replaced the ESEA, naming it the Every Student Succeeds Act (U.S. Government, 2015). The Every Student Succeeds Act focused on equity for high-need students, the collection of valuable information from statewide assessments, high standards to help prepare students for college and the workforce, and allowed for

continued investments in preschool (U.S. Government, 2015). With this reauthorization, the federal government will continue to play a role in education, even though the United States Constitution leaves the responsibility of education to states (Steinhauer, 2015). Only time will tell how politics will continue to influence education; however, federal legislation, like the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and federal grant programs such as Race to the Top, have undeniably influenced the American public education system, particularly the educators within that system (Darling-Hammond, 2010). The federal government is interested in helping teachers and school leaders improve instruction so that children in the United States will be competitive with other students on an international level (Duncan, 2009). The focus on improving teacher performance has come full circle, from students taking international assessments in their classrooms; to conversations at the international, national, and state level; to now impacting requirements of teachers and what happens in their classrooms.

Education is quite different from what teachers experienced as students themselves in that critical thinking skills were not previously intentionally taught (Gulamhussein, 2013). Therefore, professional learning opportunities are necessary to transition teachers to this new reality (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Additionally, as part of educator effectiveness and evaluation, teachers need to be given the support (professional learning) to improve their skills (Ball & Cohen, 1999). Without effective professional learning opportunities, there is little hope for educational reforms that intend to improve student results on international assessments (U.S. Department of Education, 1996a). Following the focus on educational policy for

the past 15 years, professional learning needs to be available to teachers for them to become more effective in order to increase student achievement.

Problem Identification

On a recent Gallup survey, over half the Americans surveyed stated they were dissatisfied with the current state of public education (Gallup, 2015). One solution to this issue was the creation of the Common Core Standards with clear expectations of student outcomes in mathematics and language arts (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2015). The standards were developed, with a focus on critical thinking skills, to ensure that students are well prepared for college and the workforce, allowing them to be competitive in an international market (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2015). But it is not just about standards and test scores.

The socioeconomic climate is still in flux after the recession of 2008, with a continuing increase in income inequality visible across the country (Sanders & Galindo, 2014). In some states, such as Colorado, educators are witnessing an increase of ethnic diversity in their classrooms (Garner, 2011; The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute, 2010). Latino students now account for 33% of school-aged children in Colorado, which is a 42% increase in population since 2005 and a 149% change since 1995 (Colorado Department of Education, 2015f). White students accounted for 54% of the student population in Colorado as of October 2015 (Colorado Department of Education, 2015f). Additionally, the poverty rate for Latino children is three times higher than for their White peers (Gonzalez, 2014). The shift in standards, paired with this dynamic environment and higher levels of teacher accountability, creates a suitable opportunity for conversations about professional learning programs to help teachers be better prepared to positively impact student learning (Darling-Hammond

& McLaughlin, 1995; Gulamhussein, 2013; Hargreaves, 2014; Reutzel & Clark, 2014).

When analyzing the results of the Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning Survey, a survey sent to all teachers across the state of Colorado, variations in programs for professional learning are evident (New Teacher Center, 2013). The Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning Survey reports on “educators’ perceptions about the presence of teaching and learning conditions” such as professional learning (New Teacher Center, 2013, p. 1). Therefore, it can be inferred that the types and quality of professional learning that teachers are receiving may fluctuate from one district to another. These inconsistencies in professional learning have the potential to negatively impact student learning if teachers do not have access to the support they need as professionals (Hord, 2008). If school districts do not effectively implement professional development, valuable resources are wasted and student learning is negatively impacted (Darling-Hammond, 1996; Joyce & Showers, 2002).

Purpose of the Study

In 2015, The New Teacher Project, an educational, nonprofit organization focused on teacher quality and policy, released their report, *The Mirage*. The report acknowledged the perception that educational leaders know how to improve teacher quality through professional learning, and strategies just need to be more thoroughly implemented (The New Teacher Project, 2015). The solution to improving teacher quality is not that simple. “Teacher development appears to be a highly individualized process, one that has been dramatically oversimplified” (The New Teacher Project, 2015, p. 7). With this new knowledge, the report recommended a shift in how school

districts utilize professional learning opportunities, including determining how to define effective programs and identifying which programs are successful (The New Teacher Project, 2015).

Using the recommendations of The New Teacher Project, the goal of this research study was to learn from teachers and school leaders so that future leaders may improve on the practices of the leaders before them, always with the goal of increasing student learning. According to Ribbins and Gunter (as cited in Briggs, Coleman, & Morrison, 2012), “What individual leaders do and why they do it in a variety of specific circumstances, how and why others respond as they do, and with what outcomes” can be of value to educational leaders (p. 3). The following study was conducted in hopes of uncovering practices that will provide support to current and future leaders of schools and professional learning.

Nature of the Study

Using a successful school as defined by the Colorado Department of Education (2015d), this study focused on what teachers perceived to be the elements that have led to their school’s success and if they attributed some of that success to the professional learning program. A case study focusing on the practices of one elementary school in Colorado over the course of two months was the basis for this study. The selected school served a population of both Latino and White students as well as students with varied socioeconomic status. The study was comprised of interviews, observations, document analysis, and journaling. The different types of data collection allowed for an understanding of professional learning in this particular school.

An elementary school was chosen for this study based on multiple factors. Within the region, there are few schools that are demonstrating success, based on qualifications identified by the Colorado Department of Education, in working with an ethnically and socioeconomically diverse student population (Colorado Department of Education, 2015d). In selecting a location for the study, I did not want to study a school that was using a program such as International Baccalaureate, Expeditionary Learning, or a dual language model of teaching and learning. I felt that would make the study more about the particular program than what high performing schools are capable of accomplishing. After evaluating the data available regarding Colorado schools, a school that matched the requirements was contacted and agreed to participate in the study. This school happened to be an elementary school.

Research Questions

To understand professional learning from the perspective of one elementary school staff, the following research questions were developed:

- Q1 What factors contribute to one academically successful, ethnically and socioeconomically diverse elementary school?
- Q2 What characteristics of professional learning are present in one academically successful, ethnically and socioeconomically diverse elementary school?
- Q3 How do teachers working in one academically successful, ethnically and socioeconomically diverse elementary school perceive the impact of professional learning on teaching practices?

Defining the Terms

While originally referred to by terms such as professional development or staff development, some experts have shifted to using the term professional learning, believing that teachers need to do more than develop; they need to be learners (Easton,

2008; Learning Forward, 2011; Lieberman & Miller, 2014). This shift in vocabulary gives a sense that teachers must be life-long learners by constantly reflecting and improving their teaching (Easton, 2008; Lieberman & Miller, 2014). Since leading organizations on this subject refer to it as professional learning, that is the term used in this study except in the case of direct quotations where an author's original terminology will be used.

Professional learning in the field of education is viewed as any experience that increases a teacher's ability to improve teaching and learning for students (Elmore, 2004; Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2005; Hord, 1997; Reutzler & Clark, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2004). To help teachers improve their skills, professional learning focuses on teachers deepening their understanding about their content, theories of learning, teaching strategies, and tools for differentiation to help students approach lessons (Ball & Cohen, 1996). Ideally, professional learning needs to involve all teachers on staff (Hord, 1997) and requires considerations about location, leadership and roles, data collection, evaluation, and the cultural shifts within schools and school districts (Easton, 2008).

In the literature, the concepts of professional learning (including similar terms such as professional development and professional learning community [PLC]) are distinguished (Lieberman & Miller, 2014). A PLC is one model of professional learning opportunities, although the term PLC is frequently overused, making it ubiquitous (Fullan, 2006). By definition, a PLC is a group of

educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research . . . [and] operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous, job-embedded learning for educators. (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008, p. 14)

From the perspective of Hargreaves and Shirley (2009), PLCs spread learning laterally within organizations where teachers collaborate to encourage questioning and honor the art of teaching. Since a PLC is just one aspect of professional learning, in this literature review a broader approach was taken to investigate all types of professional learning, not just PLCs.

For this research, a successful school is defined as one that has had success in closing the achievement gap for students living in poverty, as identified by free and reduced lunch eligibility. In addition, for this study and based on guidelines determined by the Colorado Department of Education, the school must serve a student population of at least a 35% poverty rate and demonstrate high student achievement for two or more consecutive years (Colorado Department of Education, 2015d). Furthermore, Latino students should make up over 50% of the student population since this is a growing population in Colorado (Garner, 2011). The term diverse is used to refer to a school that has a predominantly Latino student population.

Conclusion

International assessments are part of the debate about the quality of education in the United States (Hargreaves, 2014) as student assessment results have shown little growth in recent years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015a). Professional learning for teachers is one strategy to improve student performance on national assessments (U.S. Department of Education, 1996a) and support teachers as they adjust to changes in the field of education (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). This research study provides insight into the professional learning practices of one school that has demonstrated success with a diverse student population.

CHAPTER II

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In order to better understand professional learning practices for teachers, a review of the literature is needed. According to Creswell (2008), the literature review validates the research that is about to be conducted. The purpose is not to make predictions but to determine whether “the findings of a study support or modify existing ideas and practices advanced in the literature” (Creswell, 2008, p. 90). The findings from my research study (described in Chapter III) will be compared to past research and hopefully contribute to a deeper understanding of professional learning practices in Colorado.

On this journey through the literature, professional learning has been explored in depth, from reviewing classic and seminal works to studying current developments in the field. Beginning with adult learning theories and learning organizations, the history and purpose of professional learning will then be discussed. Next, the impact, policies, and structures that make up professional learning will be acknowledged. Research on characteristics of effective professional learning, professional learning communities (PLCs), and funding resources will then be examined. Information on evaluation practices, potential barriers, and student populations will be provided, followed by sections on implementation and the achievement gap in Colorado concluding the literature review.

Adult Learning

In the field of professional learning, there is not only a need to understand how children learn, but also a focus on adult learning, or andragogy (Rutherford, 2005).

Leaders creating and delivering professional learning for teachers need to be educated about adult learning research and theory (Glickman et al., 2005). Significant growth has been made in the field in the last few decades, clarifying concepts such as motivation, learning, and intelligence (Florer, 2012). By understanding how these concepts impact adults, professional learning can now better meet the needs of teachers.

First, a commitment is needed from the person from whom the growth is sought; without it, success will be limited (Lezotte, 2005). From there, teachers need to be valued for their experiences, requiring scaffolding and differentiation from the leader (Martin, Kragler, Quatroche, & Bauserman, 2014; Rutherford, 2005; Tallerico, 2014; Vogel, 2010). If leaders do not honor past experiences, teachers' engrained beliefs can work against growth (Elmore, 2004). Allowing adult learners to share their experiences is motivating and can add insight (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013).

According to the research, professional learning should follow constructivist theory, since adults, like children, learn through action (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 1996; Glickman et al., 2005; Gulamhussein, 2013). Both during and after action, adult learners need to be given the opportunity to reflect on what they have learned and how the learning will be incorporated into the classroom (Rohling & Spelman, 2014). Additionally, adults learn best when the learning is relevant and they are given a degree of autonomy (Vogel, 2010). Leaders need to incorporate these ideas into their planning in order to create a positive culture for professional learning

and increase the likelihood of knowledge transfer into the classroom (Rohling & Spelman, 2014).

An understanding of the research not only helps teachers understand their own learning processes but also how to help their students (Florer, 2012). Attention to adult learning helps teachers build metacognition to understand how to improve their decision-making skills regarding their actions in the classroom (Glickman et al., 2005). Teachers are continually making decisions about their content, pedagogy, epistemologies, and cultural beliefs (National Research Council, 2000). Since the focus of professional learning is to improve instructional practices, this metacognition allows teachers to move into the perspective of “teacher-as-learner” (Petrie & McGee, 2012, p. 69). When designing professional learning for the teacher-as-learner mindset, a focus is on how teachers learn best while working towards increasing student achievement (Petrie & McGee, 2012).

Learning Organizations

Many school leaders aspire to create schools that are learning organizations, organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together. (Senge, 1990, p. 3)

The hope in creating learning organizations is that teachers and students will foster a love of learning for life (Barth, 2005); therefore, becoming more human (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). While authors such as Senge (1990) believed that learning organization are created because learning is in our nature, Elmore (2004) claimed the current structures and culture of our education system actually resist learning due to the pressures of performance that prevent educators from taking the opportunities

needed to gain new knowledge. Others concluded that creating learning organizations in schools is possible (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Hord, 1997).

Principals who model learning can help create a learning culture in schools (Barth, 2005). Staff can do the same by participating in professional learning and talking with students about how they are learning as teachers (Deal & Peterson, 2009; DuFour, 1997; Wiggins & McTighe, 2007). To have student learning at high levels, teachers need to be intellectually challenged as well as active learners in rewarding professional learning opportunities (Borko, 2004; DuFour et al., 2008; Easton, 2008). School and school district leaders should look at structures and policies that do not support teachers as learners (Dufour, 1997). For example, while it is easy enough to say that a school has a culture of improvement, leaders need to evaluate what that looks like for teachers and students. Are students allowed to revise their work to demonstrate their learning and earn a higher grade? Are teachers comfortable asking for support with challenges in their classrooms or feel that it will reflect poorly on their evaluations (DuFour, 1997)?

Professional learning cannot be disjointed year to year, creating a culture in which teachers see new initiatives as fads (DuFour, 1997; Elmore, 2004). Schools need to first envision their ideal learning community and then change policies to support the vision (DuFour, 1997). It is not enough for a school to put these practices into place; staffs need to embrace the philosophies that the structures reinforce (DuFour, 1997). Learning should be seen as purposeful and geared toward improvement, acknowledge that schools provide the best environment to reflect on the practice of the school itself, create a culture that encourages change and improvement,

and finally fosters ongoing learning instead of learning that changes focus yearly (DuFour, 1997).

The focus of schools is learning (Hord, 2008). “Learning takes place when new skills and capabilities, new awarenesses and sensibilities, and new attitudes and beliefs reinforce each other” (Senge et al., 2012, p. 71). Schools hold the potential to be learning organizations as centers for learning (Senge et al., 2012), which can benefit from the expertise of the community (Costa, Garmston, & Zimmerman, 2014). When expertise is not shared for the greater good, organizational improvement is stifled (Beaver & Weinbaum, 2012). Learning organizations provide teachers the opportunity to be part of a great team who can increase student achievement (Senge, 1990).

History of Professional Learning

It has only been in the last 30 years that major changes have taken place in professional learning for teachers. Initially, the factory model permeated education by putting more emphasis on administrative bureaucracy than building the capacity of teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1996). Teachers were isolated in “egg crate schools” in which adult interaction was limited due to the design of school buildings (Hord, 2008, p. 10). Because of this isolation, while teachers were given a great amount of autonomy to create curriculum and manage students, they lacked interaction with other adults dealing with similar challenges (Hord, 2008). Many teachers understood that the best way to master good teaching was through trial and error in their classrooms (Little, 1981).

In the 1980s, the student population began to change as the immigrant population doubled (Shrestha & Heisler, 2011), and teachers needed to learn how to

differentiate their instruction (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Teachers began sharing their work with other teachers, and, coupled with the increase in adult interaction, morale increased (Hord, 2008). As the benefits of these interactions were realized, more time was allocated for teacher meetings (Hord, 2008). For some, the time was misused to focus on managerial issues and not curriculum and instruction (Hord, 2008). Other schools, however, made good use of the opportunity by sharing learnings from a conference or a successful lesson (Hord, 2008). “The [Madeline] Hunter model dominated views of teaching into the 1980s and started a trend toward increased *instructionally focused* staff development” (Danielson & McGreal, 2000, p. 13).

The model continued to evolve as educators began to collaborate on strategies and curriculum. According to Hord (2008), teamwork was the central focus before another shift occurred in which individual teachers needed to be learners. When the standards movement began in the 1990s, teachers were required to know the content and how to deliver that content to an increasingly diverse student population (Hord, 2008). In the next stage of the evolution, educators became part of a PLC, and the PLC movement continued to evolve (Hord, 2008). In the late 1990s, the term professional learning community moved from a term used by researchers to common language in the field (DuFour et al., 2008). The emphasis is now on development of the organization, not just the individual (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Little, 1981). Teachers and administrators focus on the question, “What should we intentionally learn in order to become more effective in our teaching so that students learn well?” (Hord, 2008, p. 12). Today, school officials employ a variety of professional learning structures to address this question (Joyce & Calhoun, 2010).

Purpose of Professional Learning

The purpose of professional learning is to improve teacher performance and, by extension, positively impact student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Haslam, 2010; Reutzel & Clark, 2014). According to Hord (2008), there is agreement “that the purpose of schools is *student learning* . . . [and] the most significant factor determining whether students learn well is *teaching quality*. Teaching quality is improved through *continuous professional learning*” (p. 10).

If one truly wants to invest in improving schools, there needs to be an investment in the abilities of educators (Elmore, 2004). This investment requires time and resources but pays off in building teacher capacity, a strategy that affects every student (Vogel, 2010).

We can use staff development in the same way that farmers have used cooperative extension support: to share and augment our existing knowledge, bringing in new information and protocols bit by bit, testing them in practice and comparing notes, so that we can build our capacity for generations. (Joyner, 2012, p. 404)

Professional learning is one method for improving teaching quality (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Hord, 2008; Wiggins & McTighe, 2007).

Under the umbrella of professional learning, programs can be subdivided into different content areas based on needs of the schools and staff (Joyce & Showers, 2002). One aspect of professional learning includes building content knowledge and how students learn that content through instructional strategies (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Borko, 2004; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001). More specifically, professional learning can help teachers deepen their understanding of standards and how the curriculum is aligned to teach the standards (Vogel, 2010). The time for professional learning can be used to bring awareness to teachers’ beliefs about race

and work toward eliminating subtle and overt racial biases in schools (Singleton & Linton, 2006). Professional learning can foster teacher collegiality, cognitive development, and build teacher confidence in abilities (Glickman et al., 2005). Finally, opportunities for professional learning give teachers much needed time to learn about their students' academic needs (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 1996).

Professional learning is not just about helping individual teachers. “The essential purpose of professional development should be the improvement of schools and school systems, not just the improvement of the individuals who work in them” (Elmore, 2004, p. 96). Therefore, in order to be able to improve school systems, professional learning needs to become part of the culture and structure of schools (Elmore, 2004) and the collective responsibility of a staff (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Schools with a collaborative culture are more effective than schools with just strong individual teachers (Allensworth, 2012). A cultural shift can occur when school districts and schools begin to monitor the changes and states commit to the concept of professional learning with the adoption of policies and strategies to monitor progress (Fullan, 2005).

Various reasons exist for the need for professional learning. “Weak teacher education, inherited conservative traditions, and little professional capacity for learning and change combine to inhibit reform” (Ball & Cohen, 1999, p. 5). It cannot be expected that new teachers complete their teacher preparation having mastered all of the skills necessary for a successful career in education (Mizell, 2010). One role of professional learning is to supplement the skills the new teacher still needs to develop (Reutzel & Clark, 2014). Additionally, in maintaining a professional culture,

professional learning helps to maintain the culture as some teachers leave a school and others join the staff (Garet et al., 2001). Once teachers are established in the field, they still require training to stay current with new research and developments (Wiggins & McTighe, 2007). As education reforms set lofty goals to ensure learning for all students, teachers deserve the ongoing training they need to be effective (Borko, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 1996; Easton, 2008; Elmore, 2004; Equity and Excellence Commission, 2013; Garet et al., 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 1996a). Professional learning not only needs to take place, but new learning needs to be absorbed into practice with teachers implementing strategies in their classroom (Ball & Cohen, 1999). However, if there is no evidence of knowledge transfer into the classroom from professional learning experiences, there is a sense of wasted time, energy, and money (Darling-Hammond, 1996; Elmore, 2004; Joyce & Showers, 2002).

Impact of Professional Learning

Well-designed professional learning leads to improved student achievement in all levels of schooling that serve all students (Ash & D'Auria, 2013; Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Schmoker, 2005a; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Hattie (2009) completed a synthesis of meta-analyses to determine the most important contributors to student achievement. Professional learning ranked 19th of 138 strategies that impact student achievement, and on a scale of 1.2, professional learning scored .62, with .40 being typical, in the zone of desired effects (Hattie, 2009). Professional learning is one of the most important “contributions from the teacher” to student achievement (Hattie, 2009, p. 109). Due to my interest in professional learning, which will be addressed in

Chapter III, the 19th most important strategy was selected as a focus instead of the top ranking strategy.

According to studies focusing on the impact of professional learning, both the type and extent of the professional learning needs to be considered when developing a program that effects achievement (Darling- Hammond, 2000). However, a variety of models can be effective, depending on the specific need and implementation (Joyce & Calhoun, 2010). According to Darling-Hammond (2000), professional learning needs to be ongoing, “content-specific pedagogy” that directly relates to the teachers’ curriculum (p. 6). Hattie (2009) listed the types of instruction that were effective for improving teacher knowledge: observation, microteaching, video and audio feedback, and practice scored well, while mentoring and modeling scored low. It is also imperative that professional learning aligns with both the Common Core Standards (Equity and Excellence Commission, 2013) and professional learning standards to potentially increase what teachers know (Ingvarson, 2014; Learning Forward, 2011). In a study of high and low-achieving schools to determine the differences in staff development, Joyce and Showers (2002) found similarities in “resources, topics, providers, [and] organizational support;” however, setting the high achieving programs apart were differences in “governance, delivery and focus, motivation for participation, and interpretation for policy and leadership” (pp. 174-176).

Although the purpose of professional learning is to indirectly improve students’ experience with school and learning, professional learning directly impacts teachers (Borko, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Haslam, 2010; Kise, 2006). Professional learning creates a culture of reflection, encouraging teachers to identify what they know and what challenges are present (Joyner, 2012). In working with

others, instead of in isolation, teachers' growth potential is unlimited (Rosenholtz, 1985; Vogel, 2010). Opportunities for learning and improving are necessary for maintaining a motivated and contented teaching force (Darling-Hammond, 1996; Rosenholtz, 1985; Schmoker, 2005a). When teachers are professionally fulfilled, the positive impact is visible on student achievement (Ostroff, 1992).

As state policymakers and school district officials evaluate their policies and resources, it is important to note that mandating student testing or raising salaries will not have an impact on student achievement without investing in professional learning (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). This is because, "as a result of their professional learning, leaders alter what they think, say, and do in ways that are observable to others" (Sparks, 2005, p. 157). Professional learning can be a catalyst for change in schools (Joyce & Showers, 2002).

Professional Learning Policies

Various policies have addressed professional learning efforts over the years. In 1965, the United States government passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). As part of ESEA, Title II, the Dwight D. Eisenhower Professional Development Program, defined and gave a purpose for professional learning (U.S. Department of Education, 2004):

The purpose of this title is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments. This purpose can be accomplished by . . . significantly elevating the quality of instruction by providing staff in participating schools with substantial opportunities for professional development. (U.S. Department of Education, 2013)

With a focus on the War on Poverty, the federal government funded programs through state agencies (U.S. Department of Education, 1996b). Power was given to local

education agencies to determine how to best implement ESEA with state education agencies responsible for reviewing and providing technical support for each local education agency (U.S. Department of Education, 1996a). Local education agencies were required to show the state education agencies evidence of professional learning that was connected to student learning standards, integrated current best practices, positively impacted teaching, and incorporated teaching methods for students with special needs (U.S. Department of Education, 1996a).

With government officials realizing that improving teacher performance is an important reform strategy, professional learning policies have continued to garner attention (Darling-Hammond, 1996). Following ESEA, governors approved Goals 2000 in 1989 to ensure teachers had opportunities to build their skills in order to prepare students for the 21st century (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). Then, in 1994, ESEA was reauthorized to link standards with student assessments, professional learning, and accountability (Zhao, 2009). By 2000, over half of the states approved legislation to advance teacher effectiveness through professional learning, and improvements in the quality of teachers were visible in classrooms (Darling-Hammond, 2000). In 2001, ESEA was reworked and renamed No Child Left Behind under President George W. Bush (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). In 2015, under the leadership of President Barak Obama, Congress replaced ESEA, naming it the Every Student Succeeds Act (U.S. Government, 2015). The most current legislation gives more power and flexibility to state education agencies and local education agencies, focuses on recruitment and training of teachers and school leaders, and provides for professional learning (U.S. Government, 2015).

National educational organizations have worked to create standards for professional learning, and the National Staff Development Council originally presented those standards in 2001 (Joyce & Showers, 2002). In 2011, with the National Staff Development Council now referred to as Learning Forward, the standards were revised (Learning Forward, 2015). Although various other organizations have created similar standards, the National Education Association along with 38 states, not including Colorado, have incorporated Learning Forward's standards (Learning Forward, 2015). At the time of this research project, Colorado had not incorporated statewide professional learning standards (Colorado Department of Education, 2015e). With the revisions in 2011, the shift was made from using the term professional development to professional learning in the standards (Learning Forward, 2015). The seven standards focus on educator learning in the areas of "learning communities, resources, data, learning designs, implementation, and outcomes" (Learning Forward, 2011, p. 2). The standards serve as guidelines to states and school districts as well as a tool for evaluation of professional learning programs. However, there are currently no mandates regarding the standards, since policies need to be flexible enough to meet the needs of schools with vast differences in areas such as funding and the quality of the teaching staff (Newmann, King, & Youngs, 2000).

Characteristics of Effective Professional Learning

In a review of the literature, several themes emerged regarding characteristics of effective professional learning. As detailed as some researchers can be, Little (1981) summed up important characteristics by writing, "Staff development appears to have greatest prospects for influence where there is a prevailing norm for analysis,

evaluation, and experimentation” (p. 10). When dissecting the research, effective professional learning programs benefit from a combination of multiple aspects.

Researchers in the field of professional learning have identified what they believe to be the most important characteristics of effective practice. While there might be slight differences in language, there are similarities in the essence of actions. In Table 1, common characteristics of professional learning are arranged to visually identify the most common actions. As shown in the table, allowing for collaboration is the most commonly referenced characteristic by authors in regard to professional learning.

Table 1

Characteristics of Effective Professional Learning

Author(s)	Challenges previous beliefs	Classroom application	Clear, aligned goals	Collaborative	Effective resource use	Engages in learning process	Focus on content/standards	Focus on pedagogy	Honors as professionals	Inquiry-based	Ongoing	Participant-driven	Reflective	Student -focused	Supportive leadership	Supportive structures
Ball & Cohen (1999)	X			X			X									
Bambrick-Santoyo (2012)		X	X			X							X	X	X	X
Danielson & McGreal (2000)		X		X		X		X	X			X				
Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin (1995)		X		X						X	X	X	X	X		
Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos (2009)		X	X	X			X				X			X		
Easton (2008)		X	X	X		X		X	X		X			X	X	
Elmore (2004)		X		X		X	X	X		X	X	X		X		
Equity & Excellence Commission (2013)		X		X			X	X								
Gulamhussein (2013)		X				X	X				X					X
Hargreaves & Shirley (2009)			X	X		X				X					X	X
Hattie (2009)	X			X	X	X					X				X	
Hord (1997)			X	X	X										X	
Hord (2008)		X	X												X	X
Joyce & Showers (2002)		X		X		X	X	X						X		
Joyner (2012)		X		X						X			X		X	
Knight (2013)			X	X				X	X			X				X
Little (1981)	X	X	X	X				X					X			
Martin, Kragler, Quatroche, & Bauserman (2014)				X		X	X	X		X			X			
Newmann, King, & Youngs (2000)					X		X	X				X			X	
Reutzel & Clark (2014)				X			X	X			X				X	
Sparks (2005)	X					X		X								
Tallerico (2014)			X	X			X	X			X				X	
Wiggins & McTighe (2007)		X	X					X						X		
Totals	4	13	10	17	3	10	10	13	3	4	9	5	5	7	10	5

Additionally, some authors have gone into more detail about different aspects of the effective characteristics. Successful professional learning programs are collaborative (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Easton, 2008; Elmore, 2004; Equity and Excellence Commission, 2013; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Hattie, 2009; Hord, 1997; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Joyner, 2012; Knight, 2013; Little, 1981; Martin et al., 2014; Reutzler & Clark, 2014; Tallericco, 2014). In the field of professional learning, collaboration and collegiality are distinguished from the term congenial (DuFour, 2004). Collaborative programs involve teachers learning from each other on similar problems with a goal of improved teaching and learning (Elmore, 2004; Glickman et al., 2005). Not only does collaborative work improve teaching but also teachers see the process as valuable due to the ability to meet the needs of both the individual and the school (Little, 1981). In a true collaborative environment, educators build capacity by learning from each other in a safe environment, free from fault or blame (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 1996; Joyner, 2012). In contrast, a congenial school supports isolation and superficial relationships (Glickman et al., 2005).

It does not matter which aspects of professional learning are in place if they are not planned intentionally and with purpose (Saphier, 2005). Additionally, programming must embody the changes that are sought after in the school (Wiggins & McTighe, 2007). If not, teachers will see little value in the professional learning programs and be disconnected from the process (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Learning Forward, 2011). Long-term change is not possible without teacher support and engagement (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Reutzler & Clark, 2014).

Leadership is an important aspect of successful professional learning (Tallerico, 2014). The quality of the program depends on the leadership abilities of principals and teachers (Sparks, 2005). A program with strong principal leadership that supports the mission of professional learning is strongly related to successful programs (Newmann et al., 2000). Also, through a model of shared leadership, programs find greater success (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012; DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005), especially when everyone has a clear understanding of their role and responsibility (Lezotte, 2005). Principals will need to learn how to share leadership if they are not already, and teachers will need to learn how to facilitate adult learning using methods such as coaching (Easton, 2008). Since teachers are such a critical piece of the professional learning puzzle, it is important that programs encourage teachers to identify the focus of the instruction along with the administration (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009).

As professional learning is a process, it should be ongoing (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Easton, 2008; Elmore, 2004; Gulamhussein, 2013; Hattie, 2009; Martin et al., 2014; Reutzell & Clark, 2014; Tallerico, 2014). When leaders and teachers think with a multi-year mindset, a cycle is created that is not bound by school calendars (Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Elmore, 2004). According to Danielson and McGreal (2000), “There should be no time off from growing professionally” (p. 19). Professional learning is a challenging and lengthy process (Petrie & McGee, 2012), and the hope is that this process becomes embedded in the daily activities of schools (Darling-Hammond, 2010). This gives educators frequent exposure to concepts with the intent that the new learnings will eventually infuse into the classroom (Gulamhussein, 2013; Little, 1981).

Some experts propose cycles of professional learning (Glickman et al., 2005; Husby, 2005; Killion & Roy, 2009). One vision of the cycle entails analyzing data, determining goals, creating lessons, coaching and support, and a follow-up assessment (Killion & Roy, 2009). Offering another cycle, Husby (2005) recommended identifying areas of need and then assisting teachers with lesson plans, modeling strategies, completing a learning project, and then reflecting on the process and growth. Glickman et al. (2005) proposed three stages: orientation, integration, and refinement. No matter which cycle is utilized, the hope is for teachers to identify a new focus once they have reached their goal on the previous topic (Danielson & McGreal, 2000).

Another aspect of professional learning is that it is differentiated for each school and teacher (Newmann et al., 2000; Tallericco, 2014). Each school may alter its focus at various points in time (Learning Forward, 2011; Newmann et al., 2000), and each teacher has different needs to help increase student achievement in their classroom (Martin et al., 2014; Wiggins & McTighe, 2007). According to Danielson and McGreal (2000), research supports differentiation of professional learning “to better fit the different pedagogical stages that characterize teaching staffs” (p. 16). This is no surprise that just as teachers need to differentiate for students, leaders need to do the same for teachers (Kise, 2006).

Treating teachers like professionals is an additional characteristic of effective professional learning programs (Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Easton, 2008; Knight, 2013). Some of the best school leaders in the world treat teachers as experts in their field and recognize that they work hard, trust each other, and learn from each other (Armstrong, 2006; Sahlberg, 2011). By empowering teachers with the knowledge

they need and treating them as professionals, they will focus on “doing the right things,” not just “doing things right” (Darling-Hammond, 1996, p. 6).

For professional learning opportunities to be successful, resources are needed (Hattie, 2009; Hord, 1997; Newmann et al., 2000). Resources such as material, planning time, and release time from classes give teachers the opportunity to gain knowledge (Odden & Picus, 2008). Another critically important resource is teacher knowledge (Killion & Hirsh, 2012). “The collective power of the full staff to improve student achievement school wide can be summarized as school capacity” (Newmann et al., 2000, p. 260). According to Lezotte (2005), the “capacity to improve a school already resides in the school” (p. 185). While the amount of money available to support professional learning is important, it is also important that schools use the money wisely and utilizes the capacity of leadership and staff (Newmann et al., 2000).

Professional Learning Communities

Specifically outlined practices can help educators find success using the PLC model (DuFour et al., 2008). First, and always with a focus on learning, there must be a shared mission, vision, and goals (DuFour et al., 2008; Hord, 1997). “This foundation . . . not only address *how* educators will work to improve their schools, but also reinforces the moral purpose and collective responsibility that clarify *why* their day-to-day work is so important” (DuFour et al., 2008, p. 15).

Creating a culture of collaboration is a second big idea to ensure PLCs are successful (DuFour, 2004). Staffs need to make certain that they are truly collaborating and working interdependently towards the identified goals (DuFour et al., 2008). Educators must be able to question practices and reach a depth of learning

only attainable as a team, and barriers to success must be eliminated (DuFour, 2004). Structures need to be created to allow for this collaboration time (DuFour, 2004).

In using the PLC model, teachers need to be grounded in their current reality to allow for collective inquiry (DuFour et al., 2008). By recognizing what students have actually learned, teachers can explore best practices and evaluate their current practices (DuFour, 2004; DuFour et al., 2008). Building a shared knowledge based on this information leads to better decision-making and allows curiosity and creative problem solving (DuFour et al., 2008; Hord, 1997).

The fourth characteristic of a PLC is that teachers are action-orientated (DuFour et al., 2008). Members of the PLC understand the importance in taking action and learning by doing in gaining a deeper understanding (DuFour et al., 2008). It is not until the teachers change their actions that they will witness improved results (DuFour et al., 2008).

Creating a cycle of improvement is another element of successful PLCs (DuFour et al., 2008). The cycle entails detecting what the student currently knows, identifying and employing strategies to support student strengths and weaknesses, analyzing student growth and pinpointing effective strategies, and utilizing the new learnings in the next cycle (DuFour et al., 2008). By embedding this cycle in the culture of the organization, the purpose is to create a culture of learning (DuFour et al., 2008).

The final requirement necessary to sustain PLCs is a focus on results, not intentions (DuFour et al., 2008). Student achievement is the motivation, and each team of teachers sets goals and monitors their progress toward reaching their goals (DuFour, 2004). However, the focus is not just on the achievement-focused data but

also on the information that the data illuminates (DuFour, 2004, p. 10). Teachers can identify how students perform on each skill and then collaborate with other teachers to determine how to support students (DuFour, 2004). According to DuFour (2004), intervention for struggling students is what differentiates traditional schools from professional learning schools.

For change to happen teachers will need to change their own actions and themselves (DuFour et al., 2005). “It is, however, not simply the presence of the learning community but what the community chose to focus on that influences the outcome” (Hord, 1997, p. 35). This process takes hard work on the part of teachers, but it is one that will improve student achievement (DuFour, 2004).

Structures of Professional Learning

Professional learning is different in every school; however, it generally involves similar practices (Joyce & Calhoun, 2010). It can be designed by school district office leadership for district-wide in-services or by consultants presenting at a conference (Reeves, 2010). It can be presented using digital platforms to reach teachers across the country or face-to-face in a school environment (Hargreaves, 2014). However, for professional learning to be the most relevant, it should be created by teachers and be job-embedded as part of their role as professionals (Easton, 2008; Wiggins & McTighe, 2007).

An important structure to consider is frequency (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Ideally, teachers should meet weekly at a minimum for the professional learning experiences to impact student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Traditionally, teachers in the United States have had three to five hours a week for professional activities such as lesson development, researching, and participating in study groups

(Darling-Hammond, 1996, 2010). When in-service days are identified as part of a contractual agreement, they run the risk of being disassociated from the needs of teachers in their classrooms (Elmore, 2004). By ensuring that professional learning is meaningful, education schools are working with school districts to design programs that “prepare teachers for what schools must *become*, not only schools as they *are*” (Darling-Hammond, 1996, p. 6). The goal is to make professional learning as valuable as possible for teachers.

Various activities can be considered professional learning. College courses, district in-services, and workshops led by experts are some examples of professional learning opportunities that take place outside the classroom or school (Joyce & Calhoun, 2010; Reeves, 2010). In reality, daylong workshops and conferences are referred to as professional learning; however, according to the *Elementary and Secondary School Act of 1965* (U.S. Department of Education, 2004), short-term events do not qualify as professional learning. Research has shown that programs that are shorter than 14 hours, such as workshops, are ineffective in improving student achievement (Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007). States, such as Colorado, do consider these short-term experiences as professional learning, however, and allow teachers to earn credit from these workshops to use toward recertification (Colorado Department of Education, 2015e). Critical friends groups, action research, study groups, coaching, mentoring, data teams, videotaping lessons, sharing samples of student work, and classroom observations are types of activities that can be used to build a professional learning program that is based on teachers’ classroom practices (Borko, 2004; Caffarella & Daffron, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 1996; Easton, 2008; Wiggins & McTighe, 2007). Alternative formats also exist such as new teacher

programs, teacher institutes, teacher leadership, and individualized professional learning programs (Glickman et al., 2005).

Grouping can vary based on the intent and duration of the professional learning program (Glickman et al., 2005). Teachers may be grouped based on schools, subject, interests, or grades they teach (Garet et al., 2001). Professional learning activities and grouping may last a day, as in the case of an in-service (Elmore, 2004), or over the course of multiple school years, as recommended for professional learning communities (DuFour et al., 2008).

Funding of Professional Learning Resources

To help build a case for implementing professional learning in schools, it is valuable to know the financial impact relative to the benefits (Killion & Hirsh, 2012). According to Killion and Hirsh (2012), “The continuing challenge is that many school systems cannot yet identify what they invest in professional learning and do not link investments in professional learning to student achievement” (p. 10). When school district officials collect evidence that professional learning is positively impacting student learning and clearly connected to the school district’s vision, professional learning will not be eliminated during budget reduction years (Equity and Excellence Commission, 2013). School district personnel should thoroughly identify all expenditures that constitute professional learning to gain a clear understanding of the overall investment and return on professional learning practices (Fermanich, 2002).

In order to identify and categorize spending on professional learning, school district officials should complete an audit of their programming to determine which practices are most effective (Odden & Picus, 2008). As educators see value in professional learning, they often ask for larger investments to provide more

opportunities (Odden & Picus, 2008). However, many times the appropriate level of funding is available but not properly allocated to support the most effective strategies (Gulamhussein, 2013; Odden & Picus, 2008). In fact, when school district officials do not have a clear understanding of how professional learning is financially documented, “actual professional development spending [can] exceed the districts’ own estimates by a factor of 50” (Fermanich, 2002, p. 29). Therefore, it is essential to have a clear understanding of spending before allotting more resources.

The challenge in documenting professional learning costs has resulted in underreporting (Gulamhussein, 2013), in part due to the range of definitions of professional learning (Fermanich, 2002). To help clarify spending, Odden and Picus (2008) provided a structure for categorizing professional learning. They recommended dividing costs into six different classifications:

Teacher time used for professional development; training and coaching; administration of professional development; materials, equipment, and facilities used for professional development; travel and transportation for professional development; and tuition and conference fees. (pp. 202-203)

Paying for a teacher’s time to participate in professional learning is usually the largest cost (Gulamhussein, 2013). Additionally, it is common for teachers to financially contribute to their own professional learning, an expense that is commonly not reported to school district accountants for reimbursement (Fermanich, 2002). By knowing the true cost, school district leadership can determine if they are spending too much, spending in ways that do not support agreed upon values, or spending too little on professional learning.

How much should be spent on professional learning annually? First, it must be determined how to calculate professional development expenditures. Some

researchers determine spending per teacher, while others compute the numbers by student. Odden and Picus (2008) recommended using the formula of “dividing a school’s total expenditures for professional development by the total number of licensed teachers, which usually include mentors and instructional facilitators” (p. 197). Recommendations for school district spending translate to between 1% and 8% of the operating budget with most school districts landing between approximately 2% and 5% annually (Fermanich, 2002; Gulamhussein, 2013; Killion & Hirsh, 2012). Translated, this means nationally school district leaders spend \$200 per pupil on professional learning (Killion & Hirsh, 2012); however, \$450 per student is recommended annually for professional learning (Odden & Picus, 2008).

Once school district officials have a clear grasp of the funds available for professional learning, they can begin the staffing process. Odden and Picus (2008) suggested, at minimum, an additional 20% allocation of staff to support professional development activities, including collaborative planning and curriculum development. Experts advocate one instructional coach for every 200 students (Odden & Picus, 2008). Unfortunately, since school district personnel use different categories to define professional learning, it is difficult to create general allocations to compare spending amounts per school district (Killion & Hirsh, 2012).

In the case of school leaders looking to increase spending on professional learning, it is valuable to understand the sources of money for professional learning (Killion & Hirsh, 2012). Funding usually comes from four sources, including the federal government, state government, local or county government, and external agencies such as nonprofits (Killion & Hirsh, 2012). The percentage of each fund applied to professional learning varies by state and district (Fermanich, 2002). Lower-

performing schools frequently spend more on professional learning, as do schools receiving Title I funding from the federal government (Fermanich, 2002). School leaders need to be cautious when reallocating funds for professional learning as many of the dollars schools receive are given to particular initiatives and cannot be redistributed (Killion & Hirsh, 2012).

Evaluating Professional Learning

Just as with previous legislation, the Every Student Succeeds Act requires that professional learning programs are to be frequently evaluated for effectiveness (Killion, 2003; U.S. Government, 2015). Professional learning needs to be evaluated by analyzing changes in student behaviors and most importantly changes in student achievement (Easton, 2008; Elmore, 2004; Joyner, 2012; Killion, 2003). Evaluations can be created to meet the needs of individual programs (Haslam, 2010) and provide leaders with valuable feedback that can be used to improve programs. Policymakers also want to know the impact of professional learning programs to determine if policies and funding should continue (Guskey, 2014). Additionally, teacher perceptions of professional learning are an important component of evaluations to determine the potential impact; if teachers do not see value in the professional learning, the learning will not be visible in the classroom (Guskey, n.d.; Haslam, 2010; Wiggins & McTighe, 2007).

According to Haslam (2010), there are few good models for evaluating professional learning, an unfortunate reality given the high demands for accountability in education and need for evidence to continue investing in programs. In evaluating a professional learning program, leaders need to create evaluation questions, construct a framework, collect data, analyze and interpret data, share the findings, and evaluate

the process (Killion, 2002). Models with a more specific focus on professional learning also analyze the level to which the programming utilizes adult learning research, is differentiated, and are results-orientated when analyzing student outcomes (Guskey, n.d.; Wiggins & McTighe, 2007). Killion (2002) proposed the “KASAB Chart” to evaluate professional learning in which leaders look for changes in the areas of “knowledge, attitudes, skills, aspiration, and behavior” (p. 53). Guskey (2014) proposed a model that incorporates teachers’ initial reactions to learning, organizational contributions, teachers’ implementation of new information, and the impact on student learning. The more thorough and scientific the evaluation, the more valid and possibly impactful the results will be (Killion, 2002).

Potential Barriers

There are a variety of challenges in the implementation of professional learning (Elmore, 2004). The impact of these challenges is that teachers do not value the programs, which leads to the content not being implemented in classrooms and student achievement not reaching its potential (Elmore, 2004). Professional learning programs should be examined to ensure they are benefiting teachers (Joyce & Calhoun, 2010).

For some school districts it can be a challenge to get all stakeholders to agree about the value of professional learning (DuFour et al., 2008). To be effective, professional learning needs to be a key, ongoing strategy in the school district improvement plan (DuFour et al., 2008; Elmore, 2004; Fullan, 2006; Joyner, 2012; Newmann et al., 2000; Sparks, 2005). One way to increase support for professional learning in a community can be to change the perception so that teachers are viewed “as the agents rather than of objects” of professional learning (Glickman et al., 2005).

Another challenge involves collaboration (Elmore, 2004; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). While traditionally teachers, schools, and school districts have worked in isolation, for school reform to create change on a large scale, teachers (Barth, 2005) and school districts need to collaborate with each other (Fullan, 2006). However, these collaborative relationships cannot be forced; leaders need to acknowledge when formal partnerships lack a productive chemistry (Bolman & Deal, 2010) or when collaboration is not connected to student learning (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). Partnerships can be created and plans written, but that is not a guarantee that professional learning will commence (Sparks, 2005). Professional learning will not be successful unless it is embedded in the culture (DuFour et al., 2005; Fullan, 2006).

Leaders' plans often fall short when implementing professional learning that violates basic principles of adult learning (Glickman et al., 2005). Professional learning needs to honor what educators already know, educators' interests, and school culture (Elmore, 2004; Joyner, 2012; National Research Council, 2000; Newmann et al., 2000). Teachers need to be treated as professionals who "are doing emotionally complicated knowledge work" (Knight, 2013, p. 3) and need to be supported in their role of teacher-as-learner, which honors their own learning (Petrie & McGee, 2012). Often times, when consultants are brought in to provide professional learning, the inferred message is that the teachers do not have the solutions to their own challenges (Joyner, 2012; Lezotte, 2005; Sparks, 2005). Although consultants are viewed as the ones with the knowledge, teachers do have the knowledge they need but often do not utilize all of the skills and information they already possess (Elmore, 2004; Schmoker, 2005b).

Teaching has been viewed publicly as a career that does not require ongoing learning (Ball & Cohen, 1999), but teachers need to get deep into the work of professional learning to see results in student learning (DuFour et al., 2005; Fullan, 2006). In planning for professional learning, the tasks need to be engaging and connected to student learning (Easton, 2008). “The work itself, then, is the primary motivator for learning and improvement” (Elmore, 2004, p. 115). Before initiating the work, leaders need to provide a purpose for the professional learning and teachers must consent to learn how to implement new practices (Elmore, 2004) as it can require a great amount of effort to change habits (DuFour et al., 2005). This requires leaders to be compassionate and flexible (Rasmussen, Hopkins, & Fitzpatrick, 2004).

Resistance to professional learning will occur when educators believe they are being asked to change when they infer the change is because they are not reaching their potential (Lezotte, 2005). Professional learning is most effective when it viewed as a process for improvement, not evaluation (Elmore, 2004). Additionally, tensions will increase if teachers realize that what they learned in training does not work in their classroom (Elmore, 2004). “The area of greatest struggle is not *learning* a new skill but in *implementing* it” (Gulamhussein, 2013, p. 11). This reinforces the leader’s need to give a clear purpose for professional learning, support teachers with resources, and build trust (Killion & Roy, 2009), especially during the implementation phase of professional learning (Gulamhussein, 2013). If leaders do not address any misunderstandings that are creating resistance, the change process will be disrupted (Killion & Roy, 2009).

A final challenge involves resources (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Sparks, 2005). Nationally, over \$3 billion is spent on professional learning; unfortunately it can be

spent on superficial activities that do not align with the characteristics of effective professional learning (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Equity and Excellence Commission, 2013; Sparks, 2005). Also, in times of economic stress, professional learning is one of the first items to be cut from the budget (Equity and Excellence Commission, 2013). Even though professional learning is generally not very expensive, release time for teachers consumes most of the budget (Easton, 2008). One option for increasing professional learning funding is hiring more certified teaching staff, as is done in other countries, and have each take on more roles and responsibilities (Darling-Hammond, 1996).

Implementation in Colorado

Colorado encourages professional learning for teachers (Colorado Department of Education, 2015e). In addition to the state supporting local control of professional learning through local education agencies, professional learning is a requirement for teachers' relicensing credits (Colorado Department of Education, 2015e). Teachers may participate in a variety of professional learning opportunities such as in-services, university courses, school reform efforts, and/or internships which must meet specified requirements to count towards relicensing (Colorado Department of Education, 2015c). Educators must complete at least six semester hours or 90 clock hours over five years in order to qualify for relicensure (Colorado Department of Education, 2015e). To qualify, professional learning needs

to [increase] the license holder's competence in his or her existing or potential endorsement area, or to increase the licensee's skills and competence in delivery of instruction in his or her existing or potential endorsement area. (Colorado Department of Education, 2015b, p. 1)

By supporting professional learning through educator licensing, Colorado requires ongoing teacher learning (Colorado Department of Education, 2015e).

In Colorado, local education agencies are largely responsible in ensuring effective professional learning opportunities for teachers (Colorado Department of Education, 2015a). School leaders responsible for professional learning must determine how to use resources effectively to make sure teachers receive the opportunities they need (Killion & Hirsh, 2012). With major variations in accessibility to external resources and finances, school districts are given the flexibility to determine what works best for their community (Colorado Department of Education, 2015a).

The Achievement Gap in Colorado

In analyzing student achievement, one area examined is the achievement gap. The achievement gap compares the average performance of a particular group of students with another group of students (Rothstein, 2004). The achievement gap can assess student performances based on differences such as ethnicity, gender, or poverty (Levine, as cited in Rothstein, 2004). While some schools have focused on closing the achievement gap for decades (Rothstein, 2004), in 2001 national legislation required schools to monitor progress in closing the achievement gap between students of color and White students (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, 2005).

With an increase in immigrants from Latin America (Sanders & Galindo, 2014), the achievement gap between Latino students and their higher achieving White peers is a cause for concern (Gándara, 2010; The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute, 2010). Traditionally, Latino students have not performed as well academically as their

White peers (The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute, 2010). If the current academic trend continues, the increasing Latino population will not be qualified to fill the jobs previously held by the highly educated, White, retiring baby boomer population (The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute, 2010). However, some schools have had success in closing the achievement gap between Latino and White students (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, 2005).

Traditionally, socioeconomic status has influenced achievement with students living in poverty having lower achievement than their peers not living in poverty (Gándara, 2010; Rothstein, 2004). Latino students are more likely to be living in poverty as compared to their White peers (Patten & Krogstad, 2015; Sanders & Galindo, 2014). Poverty can be measured by free and reduced lunch eligibility due to a strong association between the two variables (Nicholson, Slater, Chriqui, & Chaloupka, 2014). Professional learning leads to improved student achievement for both affluent students and those living in poverty (DuFour et al., 2005).

Gap in the Literature

There has been a great deal written about professional learning. However, in analyzing the literature, there is little written about specific best practices in professional development for teachers working with ethnically diverse student populations, particularly a growing Latino population. Additionally, few writers have addressed professional learning for teachers of students living in poverty or working with diverse socioeconomic populations.

Conclusion

It is clear that there are consistencies and inconsistencies on the subject of professional learning. A review of the literature has led to a deeper understanding of both the benefits and struggles within the field. Due to changing demographics in Colorado, including a higher Latino population and Latino students more likely to be living in poverty (Garner, 2011; Gonzalez, 2014; The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute, 2010), professional learning provides opportunities for teachers to gain the knowledge and skills they need to support their students in this changing environment (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). With the knowledge gained, it was possible to study a school where the staff was having success closing the academic achievement gap to determine if they would attribute their school's success to professional learning.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Through a review of the literature, professional learning practices were shown to benefit teacher performance and impact student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Haslam, 2010; Reutzell & Clark, 2014). As a strategy to increase student achievement, professional learning practices can help teachers better support all students (Ash & D'Auria, 2013; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; DuFour et al., 2005; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Schmoker, 2005a; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). However, less attention has been given to how school officials use professional learning practices to support teachers working with Colorado's students living in poverty and a growing Latino population.

Research Questions

To understand professional learning from the perspective of one elementary school staff, the following research questions have been developed:

- Q1 What factors contribute to one academically successful, ethnically and socioeconomically diverse elementary school?
- Q2 What characteristics of professional learning are present in one academically successful, ethnically and socioeconomically diverse elementary school?
- Q3 How do teachers working in one academically successful, ethnically and socioeconomically diverse elementary school perceive the impact of professional learning on teaching practices?

Research Process

Qualitative research methods were used to answer the research questions. According to Merriam (2009), “Qualitative researchers are interested in . . . how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (p. 13). The use of qualitative methods encouraged the research participants’ stories and perspective (Creswell, 2008), allowing for considerations regarding how the program has been individualized as recommended by The New Teacher Project (2015). In using qualitative research methods for the study, the hope was to document what professional learning looks and feels like in an academically successful, ethnically and socioeconomically diverse elementary school in Colorado.

Epistemology is described as “how we know what we know” (Crotty, 1998, pp. 3, 8). The epistemological lens of this study is constructionism as “truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities of our world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 8). Constructionism encourages the participants’ perception as they have experiences in their authentic setting such as their classroom (Creswell, 2008). In the case of this research, both the teachers and I supported a constructionist view. During the interviews, teachers made meaning of their professional learning experiences, upon which they may have already reflected. They had developed their ideas based on their experiences with others. I also viewed knowledge based on human practices. Without the teachers having experienced professional development, I would not have been able to make meaning and find themes in the teachers’ experiences. Using engaged consciousness, behaviors were analyzed for their role in professional learning practices in a successful school (Crotty, 1998).

The theoretical perspective driving this study was interpretivism.

Interpretivism, also referred to as constructivism, allows individuals to “seek understanding of the world in which they live and work” (Creswell, 2013, p. 24). Through this process, knowledge was not found but constructed (Merriam, 2009). Knowledge is constructed through what can be learned from individuals as well as the group that is made up of the individuals (Crotty, 1998). It allows individuals to construct meaning in different ways, even in regard to the same issue (Crotty, 1998). As expected, staff members have had different experiences and, therefore, variances in their interpretation of professional learning practices within their school (Crotty, 1998).

The research approach used for this study was case study. According to Bassey (2012), case studies are “conducted within a localized boundary of space and time” (p. 156). In this situation, the research focused on one elementary school over a time period of two months. Due to potential changes that were happening with the teacher leadership structure of the school district, I wanted to make sure the focus of the data collection stayed focused on professional learning and, therefore, I collected data over a shorter than ideal time frame. Specifically, this study is referred to as an instrumental case study, with the hope of the results increasing understandings about professional learning practices in an academically successful, ethnically and socioeconomically diverse elementary school in Colorado (Stake, 1994). The research focused on identifying the professional development activities of the staff and finding shared behaviors (Creswell, 2008) as well as teachers’ perceptions of the professional learning practices.

Setting

For this research study, an award-winning school, Owl Crest Elementary School (OCES), was studied in detail. Owl Crest is the pseudonym that is being used to protect the identity of the name and location of the elementary school and staff. The school, serving students in grades preschool through fifth, is located in a small town in Colorado and is a part of the mid-sized Tree Ridge School District (TRSD) (also a pseudonym). This particular school was selected as a successful school due to its student demographics and the accomplishment of the teachers in closing the achievement gap between students in poverty and those not, making the school a unique case (Yin, 2009). The staff was even presented with an award in 2010, under the leadership of the current principal, from the Colorado Department of Education highlighting student and staff achievements, publicly acknowledging their success.

The school district promotes a culture of professional learning and advancement for teachers according to conversations with school district employees and the school district website. The website address and names of the individuals with whom I have had personal conversations or correspondence with outside of the research study participants are not included to protect the confidentiality of the participants. Each principal in the school district hires instructional coaches and mentor teachers to carry out the goals of the school district's professional learning program. A formula is used to determine the number of instructional coach and mentor teacher positions for each school. The principal then determines the amount of responsibility the instructional coaches have in leading the direction of professional learning for the school. A director and two instructional coaches lead professional learning at the school district level.

In the past, professional learning was “top-down” in that the school district professional learning team created professional learning modules, which were disseminated through building instructional coaches and mentor teachers to classroom teachers. Over the years, modules have covered topics such as research-based teaching strategies, the formative assessment process, and common formative assessments as part of the school district’s curriculum redesign process as a result of the adoption of the Common Core State Standards. Recently, under the leadership of a new superintendent and director of professional learning, a more differentiated professional learning model had been put into place with a focus on teaching students to high standards using global-ready skills such as critical thinking and problem solving, effective oral and written communication, and curiosity and imagination (Wagner, n.d.). Professional learning also addresses the need to individualize instruction to meet student needs while trying to empower teachers. Additionally, time is dedicated for teachers to create student learning outcomes. Student learning outcomes are the measures of student learning used as a portion of the teacher evaluation system (Reform Support Network, n.d.). School leadership teams now drive the focus of professional learning in their schools, creating a potentially different experience for teachers in each school.

Professional learning is extremely embedded in the culture of the schools in TRSD. As part of the negotiated agreement with the local teachers’ union, principals must allow for 75 minutes of professional learning each week, time which must be built into the teachers’ contract hours; however, principals can also schedule meetings, such as staff meetings, outside of the contract time. In addition, it is mandatory for teachers to have close to 300 minutes of planning time each week. Teachers are

required to attend professional learning days in August and October that are built into the school year calendar. These school district professional learning days allow for all teachers from across the school district to come together and learn about different topics that align with the goals of the school district. Teachers usually have some choice in which sessions they attend. Both outside experts and local teachers lead the sessions.

As for OCES, 328 students, taught by 18 full-time teachers, attended the Title I School during the 2015-2016 school year. During that time, 80% of the students were identified as Hispanic or Latino, 20% of the students were White, 67% of the total student population qualified for free and reduced lunch, and 73% of the students were English language learners (OCES principal, personal communication, June 10, 2016). According to the principal, the number of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch is inaccurate due to a new online registration system that prevents some families from registering. While the population decreased by 18% from the 2014-2015 school year to the 2015-2016 school year, overall, the percentage of English language learner students increased by 18% (Colorado Department of Education, 2015g). For the purpose of this study, the percentage of students living in poverty was measured according to their free and reduced lunch status (Nicholson et al., 2014). In the year the school won the award, the school increased the percentage of students in poverty who were at or above proficient on the state exam by 8.55% with only a slight change in the student population (Colorado Department of Education, 2015h). Due to the limited number of award-winning schools in the region, no further details will be given about the award to protect the identity of the school and staff.

The principal of OCES oversees the school's instructional coaches, and the instructional coaches lead the mentor teachers. Together the principal, instructional coaches, and mentor teachers make up the school's instructional leadership team. The instructional coaches and mentor teachers are referred to as teacher leaders. The number of instructional coaches and mentor teachers depends on the number of certified staff in each school, with OCES having two full-time instructional coaches and three mentor teachers. Traditionally, instructional coaches spend 70% of their workday fulfilling their instructional coach responsibilities and 30% of their time teaching students. Mentor teachers spend 70% of their workday teaching students and 30% devoted to professional learning activities. Professional learning activities include analyzing student data, identifying school goals, creating and facilitating weekly professional learning sessions, teacher observations, co-teaching, and other duties as needed. Until recently, instructional coaches and mentor teachers had a role in teacher evaluations, which is no longer the case. Information regarding the professional learning structures of the school district and school are from the school district website, which again, to protect confidentiality, will not be disclosed. Additionally, some information is based on my years of experience teaching in the school district.

Participants

Before the data collection phase of this research project began, research participants were sought. The principal of OCES was asked on behalf of the school staff to participate in the study. The principal, along with approval from the instructional leadership team, made the decision to participate in the study.

Additionally, the school district's policy to request the opportunity to conduct research within OCES was followed.

After the approval of the research proposal by the school district and university institutional review boards (see Appendix A), I met with the principal and building instructional coaches to finalize the research plan. This allowed me to get a better understanding of the organization and a schedule of the professional learning activities. Acknowledging that the school leadership team best knows the school staff and culture, I relied on their expertise on how to introduce the research project to the staff (Coleman, 2012).

Based in the outcome of the meeting with the principal and instructional coaches, the principal first introduced the research project to the staff via e-mail. Since the next staff meeting was scheduled for a few weeks after I was able to begin collecting data, his e-mail gave the staff a brief introduction, so they understood my purpose when I was in the building. The principal was very clear to staff of his support of my research with hopes that they, as well as other schools and school districts, would be able to learn and improve on their practices based on my findings.

Volunteers were sought for observations and individual interviews, and all teachers and teacher leaders were given the option to participate in the study. It was requested that all teachers and teacher leaders who volunteer for the interviews and observations sign a consent form in which they agreed to participate after the project had been explained to them (see Appendices B and C). The principal was able to volunteer to participate only in the observations since the research was focused on the teachers' perspectives.

With a short window to collect data, I jumped into opportunities to observe professional learning events, even before I had a chance to formally introduce my research to the staff. At professional learning events, such as an instructional leadership team meeting and a math grant training, I introduced myself and project to small groups of teachers. Teachers were then given the opportunity to sign consent forms for the observation portion of the research so I could begin collecting data during the meeting (see Appendix B). At the staff meeting a few weeks later, I formally introduced my research to the entire staff. After giving teachers the overview of the project and the principal communicating his support, I asked the principal to step out of the room. I wanted to reinforce to teachers and teacher leaders that the principal would not know who was participating in the study. Each teacher was given both consent forms for the observations and interviews to help maintain confidentiality (see Appendices B and C). They were then asked to return both forms to me, folded in half to hide who had signed the forms and who had not, again to maintain confidentiality. Twenty-four staff members signed the consent for observation form and 13 signed the consent for interview form. I then followed-up with each staff member who had signed the interview consent form individually via e-mail to schedule a time to meet. Signed consent forms will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the research advisor's office at the University of Northern Colorado for three years. Throughout the study, pseudonyms have been used for each participant to protect their identity.

In the proposal stage of this research project, I had hoped for four teachers to participate in the individual interview portion of the study. My hope was that two teachers, one being a novice with zero to four years of experience and the other being

experienced with five or more years of experience, would be requested from each of the grade clusters, kindergarten through second grade and third grade through fifth grade. Both novice and veteran teachers were asked to participate in the interviews, since they would have had different professional learning experiences, and teacher perspective on professional learning varies based on years of experience (New Teacher Center, 2013). Also, with a variety of experience levels, the hope was to understand professional learning experiences over time, such as from the time the award was won through the current school year. This was important since some experts stress that professional learning should be an ongoing process (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Easton, 2008; Elmore, 2004; Gulamhussein, 2013; Hattie, 2009; Martin et al., 2014; Reutzel & Clark, 2014; Tallerico, 2014).

Teacher leaders, including instructional coaches and mentor teachers, were also asked to volunteer for participation in individual interviews. While I was hopeful the teacher leaders would plan to participate, my original thought was that the teachers' perspectives would provide enough insight into the professional learning practices, since teachers are the recipients of professional learning activities (Borko, 2004), with the leadership team's perspective an added bonus. However, since strong leadership is an important component of effective professional learning, it was hoped the leadership team would also agree to participate to provide their perspective on practice (Newmann et al., 2000; Sparks, 2005). Additionally, the leadership teams' perspective would be helpful in learning about the evaluation of the school's professional learning program.

The process of recruiting volunteers for the individual interviews was carried out using the philosophy of purposeful sampling in which the goal is to learn as much as possible (Merriam, 2009). Since multiple participants volunteered, all individuals were invited to participate, since the staff is relatively small and multiple perspectives would benefit the study. If there were no participants in a particular category, I would only interview those teachers who agreed to participate. As for gaining the teacher leaders' perspective, there was no limit on the number of teacher leaders who could be interviewed. Initially, if there was not at least one representative from each position of instructional coach and mentor teacher, that perspective would not be included in the study, since it was the teachers' perspective that was being sought. In reality, members of the leadership team were able to provide helpful information about the professional learning program that was outside the scope of the teachers' perspective.

Nine individual interviews were conducted by the end of the data collection window. Three kindergarten through second grade teachers and three third through fourth grade teachers participated in the interviews. Additionally, two specialist teachers and one instructional coach were interviewed. Two of the nine interviewed were also mentor teachers. None of the people interviewed had four or fewer years of teaching experience, meaning that everyone was considered a veteran teacher with five or more years teaching experience. Four of the people interviewed had only taught at OCES, not including student teaching or permanent substitute positions in other schools. One teacher had taught at another school in TRSD in addition to OCES. Four teachers had taught in other school districts with one of those teachers also teaching at another school in the school district. Of those who had experience teaching in other schools, three of them had four or fewer years at OCES, making

them novice teachers in this school. The teachers who had taught in other school districts were able to provide an interesting perspective on the professional learning program since they had another model to which to compare practices. Their perspectives will be addressed more in Chapter IV and Chapter V.

In addition to recruiting volunteers for the interviews, all teachers and school leaders, including the principal, were solicited to participate in the observation portion of the study through their involvement in professional learning activities such as school-wide events, team meetings, and coaching opportunities. In the case of individuals who chose not to participate in the observations, information was not collected about them. Their decision was respected with no repercussions from the school leadership team or me.

Data Collection

The goal of the data collection process was to be thorough to “increase the *reliability* of the information . . . to maintain a chain of evidence” (Yin, 2009, p. 112). Multiple methods of data collection took place in order to answer the research questions. The multiple methods included interviews, observations, document analysis, and journal writing.

The interview model employed for this study was a semi-structured model, allowing for both consistency and flexibility in the questions and responses (Merriam, 2009). By using a somewhat flexible model, I was able to ask additional probing questions to increase the depth of understanding regarding the participants’ experiences (see Appendix D). Face-to-face interviews were conducted with individual participants (Coleman, 2012), and my role was primarily as a listener (Coleman, 2012). Interviews were recorded for transcription, and I took field notes.

The recordings allowed me to make sure everything that was said by the participant was available for analysis, and I attempted to document nonverbal behavior as well as reactions through note-taking (Merriam, 2009). All efforts were made, including the intentional ordering of questions, to avoid leading questions (Merriam, 2009). Questions were piloted with a test group of teachers not involved in the study before the data collection began in order to make sure that the questions were clear and sufficiently focused without being leading.

Observations were also recorded through field notes (Merriam, 2009) (see Appendix E). I attended relevant professional development activities as a nonparticipant observer, keeping distance from the participants and not interacting during events (Creswell, 2013). Observations included both formal and informal activities (Yin, 2009) such as school-wide events, team meetings, and coaching opportunities. Because I would potentially be recording observations about teachers who were not participating in the interviews, all teachers on staff were asked to complete the research consent form (see Appendix B). In the case of individuals who chose not to participate in the observations, information was not collected about them. Their decision was respected with no repercussions from the school leadership team or me. During observations, I recorded information about “the physical setting, participants, activities, interactions, conversations, and [my] own behaviors during the observation” (Creswell, 2013, p. 166). Field notes contained descriptions, quotations, and my connections (Merriam, 2009) with the full notes being prepared as soon after the observation as possible (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009).

Relevant documentation was also collected. Documents were used to give me insight into past activities as well as a better understanding of current activities

(Fitzgerald, 2012). Some of the types of documents that were sought were the school Unified Improvement Plan which outlined the school-wide goals and plans for improvement (Colorado Department of Education, 2015i), schedules of professional learning activities, and meeting handouts and agendas. Additionally, school district documents were collected and analyzed such as professional learning policies and the school district strategic plan.

A research journal was kept to record “who was seen, when, where, and why, and recording when analytical work was done” (Bassey, 2012, p. 166). Additionally, the journal was a place for me to document unbiased accounts as well as thoughts and reflections on events (Morrison, 2012). The research journal was to document the data collection process.

Data Analysis

As the data were collected, data analysis took place with the goal of “making sense of the data” (Merriam, 2009, p. 174). Due to my general lack of experience with analyzing data using the following methods, all data were analyzed since I was not sure which information would prove to be valuable (Saldaña, 2009). First, data were organized into files with the next step of making notes and forming initial codes (Creswell, 2013). Open coding was then used to identify the initial sub-topics, followed by axial coding that allowed me to concentrate on each dominant theme (Creswell, 2013). An important step in case study research was to then write about the case, focusing on the setting and the impact of the setting on events (Creswell, 2013). Categorical aggregation took place in which I used “a collection of instances from the data, hoping that issue-relevant meanings will emerge” in the form of themes (Creswell, 2013, pp. 190, 199). As predicted, the analytic technique of explanation

building was the appropriate method of analysis based on the research questions (Yin, 2009). Patterns were identified, and then naturalistic generalizations were made that can be applied to other cases (Creswell, 2013). Finally, the findings, as found in this document, have been presented in the appropriate written format. A condensed version of the findings will be presented to the OCES and TRSD leadership teams. I also hope to present the findings at state and/or national conferences.

Each type of data was analyzed using the appropriate method as well as open and axial coding. Interview transcripts have been read and highlighted for emerging themes (Coleman, 2012). Codes were created in instances where the evidence supports information in the literature review (Fitzgerald, 2012), although not all data initially appeared to relate to topics in the literature review. Observation field notes were analyzed as soon as possible (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009) and also read and highlighted for codes and then themes. Documents were been analyzed using the template proposed by Fitzgerald (2012) that identifies the type of document, physical qualities, intended audience, and analysis (see Appendix F). From the initial analysis, coding took place to allow for a deeper analysis (Fitzgerald, 2012). The research journal was analyzed in the same way as the observation notes. I completed all coding and categorizing procedures, becoming fully immersed in the data.

Trustworthiness

Since case studies are not absolutely replicable, the term trustworthiness was the goal of the study instead of validity (Bassegy, 2012). I tried to allow for the honest exchange of information between participants and myself (Creswell, 2013). One strategy was for me to communicate with participants how the research process would evolve and how the findings would be disseminated before participants agreed to

engage in the study (Busher & James, 2012). Furthermore, I explained how confidentiality would be maintained through the use of pseudonyms and by omitting all potential identifiers from all versions of the findings, no matter the method in which they would be presented. The names of individual interview participants were kept confidential, even from members of the school staff, including the principal. I also refrained from giving any clues to the case study location during conversations with those interested in the research. This helped build trust between the participants and me and communicated to participants that their input did “influence the trajectory of the project” (Busher & James, 2012, p. 96). Maintaining trust was incredibly important to me, since I worked in the same school district where the research took place. My name and reputation, and well as the relationship I built with the staff during the process, was very important to me.

Triangulation of the data took place to corroborate the findings with the goal of identifying “converging lines of inquiry” that all point to the same themes (Yin, 2009, pp. 115-116). It is recommended that at least two different triangulation procedures are utilized (Creswell, 2013). Transcripts were reviewed against the original recordings to ensure the concepts were valid. Then, member checking, the act of seeking feedback from some participants to ensure proper interpretation, took place (Merriam, 2009). When necessary, participants were able to add additional information or clarification, which only happened in one situation. Due to the timing of the completion of the interview transcriptions over summer break, only four of the interviewees replied regarding member checking, even though each person was e-mailed a copy of their transcript. Additionally, an audit trail was available. The “flow chart of the data, and of its analysis and interpretation” was created to clearly codify

the research process (Bassey, 2012, p. 158). A peer then conducted an audit of the research using the audit trail to ensure clarity and objectivity of the findings as well as strengths and weakness of the research (Bassey, 2012; Creswell, 2008). With triangulation having taken place, the results were reported and disseminated as this research holds potential implications for leadership.

Using ethical research protocols, institutional review board practices as dictated by both the university and school district were followed. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants as well as any descriptor that might prompt anyone to the name and location of the elementary school. All data were stored electronically on Google Drive, accessed through a password protected account and computer. Interviews were recorded, and then a hired transcriber transcribed half of them to help expedite the process. A family emergency prevented the transcriber from completing the work by the given deadline, so I transcribed the remaining interviews. Typed transcripts were then checked for accuracy against the recorded transcript, and I corrected any inaccuracies. All documents involving this research were safely stored in a locked file cabinet in my home office and on a password protected computer, with the exception of the consent forms that were stored at the university with the research advisor, for at least three years following the completion of the study. After three years, all electronic files will be deleted.

Researcher Perspective

To help minimize the researcher's perspective, the above validation techniques such as member checking and an audit trail were utilized (Creswell, 2008). Using these methods reminded me to be self-reflective in my role and in the data analysis (Creswell, 2008). Additionally, I disclosed my personal history, both in this document

and to the staff of OCES, which naturally influences qualitative research (Creswell, 2008).

Since I began my career as a teacher, I have been interested in professional learning; in fact, it is my passion. Before I even knew professional learning existed, teaching strategies and how I could use them to improve student outcomes fascinated me. When I was assigned a mentor teacher my first year teaching, I experienced the impact of effective coaching, and when I had to present a teaching unit as part of a critical friends group, I used the valuable feedback to reflect on and then revise my unit plans. From that first year, I knew that at some point in my career I would work to support teachers. At this point in my career, I have spent six years in a professional development role, and even though I am not currently, it is still my passion.

I have been an employee of TRSD since 2003 and, therefore, familiar with the school district history as well as the general culture and practices of the school district. Each school in TRSD uses the foundational pieces of the school district culture and practices to create their own distinct culture and variations in practices. At the time of the study, I was employed as a teacher in a high school that served some students who had attended OCES. Due to working at the high school level, elementary school experiences were rarely, if ever, discussed with students or other teachers. Other than school district events, there was little to no interaction with the staff of OCES prior to the study; however, I have known a handful of staff members as professional acquaintances over the years.

As an employee of the school district, I am familiar with the district-wide professional learning practices. As each school is able to personalize practices, previous to this study I was unacquainted with the culture and practices surrounding

professional learning at OCES. Prior to my current role as a high school teacher, I was an instructional coach at a different high school in the school district. Aside from a familiarity with implementing professional learning practices, I do not feel that experience had any bearing on this research. To remain as objective as possible, I have followed the processes outlined regarding triangulation of the data as well as the rules in conducting research as outlined by the university instructional review board.

Conclusion

In Colorado, teachers are witnessing shifts in student population (Garner, 2011; Gonzalez, 2014; The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute, 2010). As discussed in the literature review, professional learning is one method to improve teacher practice and increase student achievement (Hattie, 2009). Researchers have identified characteristics of effective professional learning (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Easton, 2008; Elmore, 2004; Equity and Excellence Commission, 2013; Gulamhussein, 2013; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Hattie, 2009; Hord, 1997, 2008; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Joyner, 2012; Knight, 2013; Little, 1981; Martin et al., 2014; Newmann et al., 2000; Reutzler & Clark, 2014; Sparks, 2005; Tallericco, 2014; Wiggins & McTighe, 2007). The goal of this study was to identify the professional learning practices of a school with a record of closing the achievement gap with a high Latino population and high number of students living in poverty. The results of this study will be used to encourage leadership teams in other schools and school districts serving diverse populations to support and adequately fund professional development and therefore increase student achievement.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The research problem highlighted in this qualitative case study is multi-layered. A shift in standards (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2015), along with an increase in student ethnic diversity (Garner, 2011; The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute, 2010) and the number of Colorado students living in poverty (Gonzalez, 2014), have changed the teaching environment of Colorado classrooms. Additionally, teachers have reported variations in opportunities for professional learning (New Teacher Center, 2013). These inconsistencies in professional learning have the potential to negatively impact student learning if teachers do not have access to the support they need as professionals (Hord, 2008). If school district leaders do not effectively implement professional development, valuable resources are wasted and student learning is negatively impacted (Darling-Hammond, 1996; Joyce & Showers, 2002).

Multiple methods of data collection, including individual interviews, observations, document analysis, and a research journal, were used in this study. Data were analyzed using the processes described in Chapter III. The findings from those data emerged into three themes: the importance of quality leadership, embedding professional learning in a learning organization, and a focus on the community.

Without quality leadership, the second two themes would not exist. After a discussion of the themes, the three research questions will be answered.

Participant Profiles

Before going into detail about the themes, it is helpful to get to know the participants of the individual interviews. Relevant information for each person interviewed is included in Table 2. Details about the participants are only to the level of detail that will honor the confidentiality agreement and protect their identity. Nine staff members of Owl Crest Elementary School (OCES) participated in the individual interviews.

The Importance of Quality Leadership

During the two months of the data collection process, I only observed the principal, Mr. G, of OCES about four times; however, he appeared to be ever-present. It was clear how loved and respected Mr. G was by the staff, and his vision and beliefs have permeated so many aspects of the school. When I did observe him, he spoke in a motivational manner, like a coach getting the team ready for the big game. Mr. G is charismatic in a way that “everyone thinks that [he] is their best friend, which is kind of nice to have in a boss,” smiled Johann, a specialist teacher at the school. It was apparent that his guidance has been a big reason for this school’s success.

Table 2

Interview Participants at Owl Crest Elementary School

Name ^a	Title	Years in Education	Years at OCES	Has taught at other schools besides OCES?
Eleanor	Teacher – lower elementary & mentor teacher	More than 10	Less than 5	Yes
Erika	Instructional coach	More than 10	More than 10	No
Gissell	Teacher – lower elementary	More than 10	More than 10	No
Isadora	Teacher – lower elementary	More than 20	More than 10	Yes
Johann	Specialist teacher	More than 20	More than 10	Yes
Lola	Teacher – upper elementary	More than 10	Less than 5	Yes
Matilda	Specialist teacher & mentor teacher	More than 10	More than 10	No
Sara	teacher – upper elementary	Less than 10	Less than 10	No
Violet	Teacher – upper elementary	More than 10	Less than 5	Yes

^aAll names used in this study are pseudonyms and may not reflect the actual gender of the participant.

Overwhelmingly, teachers said the principal was a component (usually their first answer) leading to the success of the school, and one interviewee spoke about Mr.

G's actions, such as hiring practices, as having an impact. Throughout the data collection process, sub-themes emerged about the principal, including his ability to use humor, establish a clear vision, hold high expectations for students and staff, create opportunities for shared leadership, support professional learning practices, and encourage collaboration. Without his leadership, many of these pieces would not be in place. What is most significant is that the principal of OCES used these sub-themes to foster a positive work environment.

Use of Humor

One of the first things that struck me as different from any school I had worked in or observed was the importance and frequency of humor and laughter among the staff. As Isadora remarked, "Happy teachers make happy kids, and happy people make for more success." While humor and laughter were present in every group environment I observed, it was most obvious when the principal entered the room. This use of humor was in no way to belittle the students or staff or to make light the seriousness of the task in front of these educators. Instead, it seemed to be because the staff enjoyed working together and the work they do. Humor was not just an afterthought in this school; it was even posted as a value in the professional learning community (PLC) room along with the terms equality, choice, and voice. Isadora's point seemed to ring true. As I walked through the halls, I observed a bunch of cheerful, smiling kids. Perhaps Isadora was correct. In my conversations, the teachers shared how these happy students were having great success and making growth.

A Clear Vision

Half of the teachers interviewed repeated the mantra, "These are all our kids," which, according to Isadora, is set forth by Mr. G. As Isadora explained, "He really

encourages working together as a team and looking at our students as a group, not as, ‘These are my kids, these are your kids, but they’re all our kids.’” Another teacher, Lola, who had recently started teaching at OCES after teaching in another school district, made the following observation:

In my previous school they might say, “Those are the first-graders or those are the fifth-graders, I don’t have responsibility for them.” Everyone here feels, not necessarily ownership of each other’s children, but they feel a responsibility towards meeting the needs of all the kids. If we’re walking past a student who’s not in our grade and who’s is having a meltdown in the hallway we stop and talk to them. If they’re in the bathroom and they shouldn’t be, they need to get back to class, we stop and refocus them and send them back. I definitely think that attitude of everybody contributing to each child helps with student success because they feel more invested. They value every adult. They’re not thinking, “That adult doesn’t care about me because I’m not in [second] grade.”

To help create a culture that supports all students, four teachers made reference to the idea that the principal hires teachers who are passionate about working with an ethnically and socioeconomically diverse population of students. According to a specialist teacher, Matilda: “I feel like he creates this; he has worked very hard to bring in people who are passionate and who really believe strongly in working with the population of kids that we have and who have high expectations for these kids.”

Mr. G communicates his belief in the importance of educating the students of OCES. During a staff meeting, the principal reviewed the end of the school year activities and reminded teachers to stay focused on teaching, even with testing, field trips, and other school events. He told the teachers, “Our kids can’t afford to not learn.” Serving a transient population with many students multiple grades below grade level at the beginning of the school year, Mr. G knows how important it is for teachers to use all the time they have to help students make more than one year of growth each school year. In referring to the students living in poverty, Johann

explained, “We try to build them up as much as possible; we try to get their educational level as high as possible, just hoping to lift them up [out of poverty], as many as we can.” The principal and staff of OCES work hard to create a quality educational foundation for their students that will allow for their students to have future success. But it is not just about test scores. During the instructional leadership team meeting I observed, the conversation focused on global-ready skills (Wagner, n.d.) and how those skills will help teachers educate the whole child, not just create a proficient test taker.

High Expectations

The principal of OCES has high expectations for students and staff. Isadora described how Mr. G communicates high expectations to students through the teachers. After receiving some professional development on the topic, teachers began the school year talking to their students about what it means to have a growth mindset and grit. Students learned what it looked like to put in more effort and energy when something was hard. Isadora had her students make a poster documenting what they could say instead of, “I can’t do this, or this is too hard.” Throughout the year Isadora would reference the poster whenever students were using defeating language. To remind all students about the concepts of growth mindset and grit, small posters were also placed around the school in hallways.

In striving to have high expectations for students, the staff made a significant change in their Response to Intervention process years ago. Erika, the instructional coach, explained the shift:

I think at one point our meetings just focused a lot around, “Oh, this poor kid, he lives in this little house and lives with his aunt and he doesn’t get any sleep” . . . and we got past the excuses that we have no control over. We went about

our RtI [Response to Intervention] a long time ago, saying, “Those aren’t a part of it anymore. We can’t control that; what can we control [for] the kids in this building?” [In the past] we talked a lot about, “What’s wrong with this kid? And what is his background?” Great, we need to know it, and that might build a capacity for us to have more empathy towards the student and then hold him to higher standards. “You’re here, let’s get busy, and let’s do what needs to be done.” I think that’s just something we have to focus on.

By concentrating on what the staff can control, teachers are able to help students focus on their education while they are at school. From Erika’s perspective, when the teachers stop making excuses for the students, the students are able to practice having grit and working with a growth mindset.

Although no students were interviewed for this project, through observations it seems that the principal values his relationship with students while maintaining high expectations for them. At the end of the school day Mr. G stands in the lobby of the school as students leave the building. With a smile on his face, he gives “knuckles” to the kids as he addresses them by name, frequently making specific comments to encourage or touch base with individual students. After spending over a decade as the principal, Mr. G knows all of the students’ stories as well as those of their siblings and families.

High expectations do not need to be at the expense of building relationships with the staff either. Sara, a teacher in the upper elementary grades, expressed that Mr. G “sets really high expectations but then still has a relationship where we can bounce ideas off of him and feel comfortable.” While communicating high expectations, the principal also respects his staff members as individuals. During a leadership team meeting the principal made reference to a teacher’s own children, a comment that sparked a friendly conversation at the end of the meeting when the principal then shared a photo of his own daughter from the previous weekend.

The principal also honors teachers as professionals. On multiple occasions during the data collection process I was informed that a scheduled professional learning activity was going to be canceled to give teachers time to complete other responsibilities, such as administrating student assessments. The instructional leadership team meeting was even postponed by 15 minutes so that teacher leaders could participate in yoga after school with the rest of the staff. High expectations are not at the expense of community and relationships, nor are they mutually exclusive.

Shared Leadership

The principal leads the direction of OCES, but every teacher has a role in helping the school function efficiently. Teachers, in addition to their contracted teaching obligations, are expected to be in charge of at least one event or committee. For example, one teacher is responsible for organizing the spring talent show while another runs the school store where students can buy items with tickets they earn for positive behavior. This allows for each teacher to be a leader in some aspect.

According to Johann, “[Mr. G] makes everyone feel valuable.”

Much of the shared leadership is grounded in the school district’s teacher leadership structure, including instructional coaches and mentor teachers. Since the school does not have an assistant principal, the two instructional coaches fill the role when the principal is out of the building, taking on responsibilities in addition to their instructional duties. The principal has created a situation where this seems to work. In addition to the instructional coaches and mentor teachers, OCES has two in-building grant-funded math coaches who observe and have coaching conversations with teachers.

Starting with school district goals, the instructional leadership team works with the principal at the beginning of the school year to set school goals. The principal oversees this process and gives his approval. The instructional coaches embed the goals into the professional learning activities for the year, and mentor teachers help teachers align their practices with the principal's goals and vision. When asked about her role, Eleanor, a mentor teacher explained that one of her roles is in "listening to what our leadership, both the principals and [instructional coaches], plan and guiding the teachers towards that plan."

Support of the Professional Learning Program

From my observations, the principal supports professional learning for teachers and views this as a tool to help students learn. When the first evolution of the school district's professional learning program was put into the schools in the early 2000s, the principal volunteered to have OCES be one of the pilot schools. When I introduced my research to the staff, he communicated his support due to the opportunity to learn and improve practices based on the results.

It struck me how much emphasis and importance was placed on the professional learning program and activities. I will go into more detail regarding the depth of the professional learning program in a later section; however, the principal's support of the program was significant, especially if I considered what the program would look like without his support. The program included time each week for PLC, lesson study, and group planning. The PLC lasted 90 minutes and lesson study was 45 minutes. This exceeded the school district's requirements for professional learning time. Mr. G saw enough value in these practices to build this time into teachers'

schedules, and then created the expectations that teachers were to come to the professional learning activities prepared as well as participate.

A Collaborative Environment

As part of the professional learning program, teachers have opportunities to collaborate, and the principal has made collaboration a priority. Mr. G reinforces this by creating structures that support a collaborative environment. Team planning is one structure according to Matilda. “Honestly, we’ve always valued collaboration in this school. The principal has made it an expectation that you are getting together with your grade level team and collaborating during team planning once a week.” Mr. G also encourages collaboration during the weekly PLC time as well as made it a part of the school culture. From Isadora’s perspective:

He really encourages working together as a team. . . . We don’t have that mentality of going into your room and . . . trying to be better than somebody else; we’re trying to help all of the kids. That’s the mindset . . . and I think it really contributes to this school’s success.

All three of the upper grade teachers interviewed spoke about wanting even more collaborative time with other teachers who teach similar content areas. Without this culture of collaboration, structures such as team planning, PLC, lesson study, and co-teaching would not be as successful.

From the literature review and my own personal experiences, I knew the importance of supportive school leadership in creating effective professional learning programs. Even in a school district with a well-developed teacher leadership structure the principal’s role is critical. The principal of OCES has used his leadership skills to create positive practices for student growth and success.

Embedded Professional Learning in a Learning Organization

As explained in Chapter III, Tree Ridge School District (TRSD) had a strong history of professional learning, leading to it being embedded in the culture of the school district and, therefore, each school. The OCES had embraced the school district's model, and, particularly in the last two years, has taken advantage of the school district's change in philosophy regarding the creation and dissemination of professional learning content. The OCES shaped a model that still incorporates many of the practices of the previous school district model, but it is now more closely aligned to meet the needs of the staff to support the particular student population. One of Erika's goals as the instructional coach was to "continue to bring in professional development that best meets the needs of the kids in our school."

All teachers interviewed were able to give evidence of how the information they learned in PLC helped their students learn. From Isadora's perspective of over 30 years in education, professional learning practices are "essential . . . to have teachers working together for the benefit of all students." The professional learning program has created a structure for the staff at OCES to work towards becoming a learning organization.

Professional Learning at Owl Crest Elementary School

The professional learning practices at OCES support teacher learning. The PLC, lesson study, mentoring, and co-teaching all reinforce the need for teachers to be reflective learners. Looked at individually, as well as collectively, these practices create a culture of learning.

Staff at OCES use the term PLC to refer to the Thursday professional learning time. The PLCs are broken into grade level teams of kindergarten and first grades, second and third grades, and fourth and fifth grades. Specialist teachers also have a PLC. The PLC and instructional leadership team meetings, as well as other staff learning activities such as math grant meetings, take place in the PLC room. The small groups of teachers sit around a large table, covered with handouts, laptops for looking at student data, and snacks in the PLC room.

The information on the PLC room walls communicates what, from the guidance of the school district office leadership and principal, is valued. Colorful, laminated pages line a narrow wall, listing the Principals for Partnership and Working Together. These principles include equity, choices, voice, dialogue, reflection, praxis, reciprocity, and humor. Another wall displays a large graphic organizer of the Formative Assessment Process, the professional learning focus across the school district a few years ago, surrounded by easel-sized sticky notes for each grade level. Each large sticky note has a chart labeled with score ranges for the different levels of proficiency on the Northwest Evaluation Association assessment. Smaller sticky notes are placed in the columns appropriate to the score to identify each student. These sticky notes represent the data analysis process that the teachers, like Gissell, find so rewarding. Gissell observed:

One of our favorite things to do is, at the beginning of the year, give the kids some sort of assessment like NWEA [Northwest Evaluation Association] and see where they're at. Then [we] check in at mid-year and end of the year. We have actually put up sticky notes [with] their scores and moved those sticky notes. As a teacher you feel good; you're like, "I just moved that kid from here to there!" Even though the scores might not meet state or national [benchmarks], you could tell that you were moving that kid and it felt so good.

On a third wall, a poster provided by the school district office hangs next to a white board to remind teachers of the global-ready skills, the school district's current focus. Between these larger documents, smaller papers demonstrate teachers' thinking from previous weeks of PLCs.

As part of the PLCs on Thursdays, teachers are frequently presented with new information such research-based teaching strategies. The instructional coach provides teachers with literature on a relevant topic and uses engaging teaching strategies to teach and model concepts. Teachers are usually given a choice of strategies to try and begin thinking about how they can use them in their classroom. This year, the strategies have related to the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol model, "a research-based and validated instructional model that has proven effective in addressing the academic needs of English learners throughout the United States" (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2016, para. 1). Teachers are expected to try at least one of the strategies with their students and return to PLC the following week able to reflect on their experience and share with the other teachers. Some weeks, teachers are expected to bring samples of student work for PLC for the group to analyze. "We do a lot of reflecting on our teaching, which is a nice feature to have," stated Violet, a teacher in the upper grades.

As I moved through the data collection process at OCES, I was interested in what the professional learning was like in the years that the staff won the award and how many of those practices were still in place. The instructional coaches and principal were still guiding the direction of the program for the school; however, a number of key factors have changed, resulting in different focuses for professional learning for the past few years. The teachers had been using the teaching resource,

Learning by Design, that provided very scripted lessons. When the switch was made to Common Core State Standards in hopes of using more rigorous standards, Learning by Design no longer fit. As the school district worked to create a new curriculum, much of the professional learning time was geared towards supporting teachers with the new standards, curriculum, and teaching resources. Four years later, the teachers were finally in a place where they can begin to focus again on how they teach, not just what they teach.

In addition to teachers planning individually to use the strategies in their classrooms, lesson study on Tuesdays is a time for teachers to meet with other teachers in their grade level to design a lesson using one or more of the School Instruction Observation Protocol strategies presented the previous Thursday at PLC. Four of the participants commented about how lesson study really helped them think deeply about a lesson. According to Sara, “Lesson study is a time when we can really dig into one lesson. . . . You are actually planning one really solid lesson together.” From Matilda’s perspective, lesson study helped make the professional learning practices the most effective and focused she has experienced in her 11 years at the school. She described lesson study in more detail:

It was facilitated mostly by the [instructional coach], whereas in the past it was, “Go plan with your team and try to do this,” while all the other stuff got in the way. This was a very dedicated focus, 45 minutes for one lesson, facilitated with an [instructional coach], where they sat down and said, “What are you working on? What are the standards? Walk us through [the lesson].” They recorded it all. I think the protocol and having it facilitated made it effective.

During the lesson study, the instructional coach would fill out a two-page template as the teachers discussed the lesson, recording the learning targets and identifying which School Instruction Observation Protocol strategies the teachers planned to incorporate.

Whereas the instructional coach would lead the PLC, the teachers directed the lesson study. At the end of the lesson study, the instructional coach would share the document, which became their lesson plan, with the teachers.

Co-teaching and the use of mentor teachers provided the opportunity for teachers to apply what they learn in PLC and plan in lesson study in their classroom. Instructional coaches participate in the co-teaching and mentoring process as well to help teachers solidify what they are learning. Lola had numerous opportunities to co-teach with an instructional coach and liked how the school's model works:

I think in our school and our district, we have an excellent model, especially compared to where I was before, of co-teaching and mentoring. With our two instructional coaches, one of them will lead the PLC in that week and then the other one will try to work with co-teaching. I've worked specifically with one of the instructional coaches, and she'll come in and we'll co-teach math, and then we'll . . . reflect.

She also took advantage of opportunities for observations from a mentor teacher:

I'm personally as a teacher focusing on questioning, so something I'm going to [say to] my mentor is, "Hey, come in, watch me with my questioning, give me some feedback." Sometimes things I may have done three or four years ago that I just got out of habit of. . . . It would help to have that outside perspective. I think that's very beneficial for us.

Isadora shared about a time when she was co-teaching and noticed that the learning target did not align with the assessment. In a very brief conversation the two teachers were able to discuss how to make the lesson stronger. From Isadora's perspective, "That is to me professional development. That's learning together." They were able to apply what they were learning in PLC into practice. Isadora felt that the model at OCES has helped her change the way she teaches.

Owl Crest Elementary School as a Learning Organization

While many things are moving in the right direction, not everything is perfect at OCES. The instructional leadership team and staff at OCES are able to acknowledge some of their challenges and work toward improvement, which is why it stands out as a learning organization. With a sense of urgency, the leadership team models a culture of learning that impacts everyone, including students. The professional learning program provides a structure for and conversations about learning.

During an instructional leadership team meeting, the principal discussed the need to bring a balance between building up the academic skills of the students and developing the whole child through the use of the global-ready skills. In their role as leaders, it is the responsibility of instructional coaches and mentor teachers to help teachers trust themselves professionally enough with the academic portion so that they can then support teachers as they begin incorporating global-ready skills into their lessons.

The principal also acknowledged that educators and students are given conflicting messages, a practice that needs to change. He wanted teachers and students to be intellectual risk-takers, but the accountability measures do not allow the two concepts to co-exist. Instead of saying to students, “Try this . . . no, that is wrong,” teachers need to give feedback to students so that students learn to persevere. Opportunities were provided during the instructional leadership team meeting and staff meeting for educators to discuss how to balance the need for accountability with time for students to practice and demonstrate their learning.

A culture of learning is not limited to the professional learning activities. In teaching students to have a growth mindset and grit, the teachers are letting students know that they might not get everything right the first time, and it is okay to fall down, as long as you get back up. This was the message Isadora gave her students, and the message from the principal as well. The professional learning structures seamlessly provide opportunities for the staff to strive to improve for the benefit of their students.

A Focus on the Community

The OCES is a happy, welcoming school with a positive and strong community. The population that OCES serves is very much at the forefront of the school's identity. Additionally, the staff's actions reflect the needs of the students. To help increase student success, teachers have a passion for the student population, professional learning supports student needs, and families are involved in their child's education.

A Passion for the Population

As mentioned earlier in Chapter IV, the principal hired teachers who were passionate about working with an ethnically and socioeconomic diverse population. All of the teachers I observed and interviewed were White, and while many were struggling to support themselves in an expensive rural community, they would be considered middle class. From Johann's perspective:

We are relatively homogenous. . . . We're just more like each other from our wealthiest to our poorest, we're more similar than we might be at a different school where you have somebody from a rich community and somebody from a poor community in the same school. I think that does help. We understand each other better. And most of us as teachers are kind of struggling to make ends meet, too, and I think that helps us kind of relate to our kids a little better and because our kids are more similar. . . . We don't take a "them" and "us" perspective. I know our teachers; we're all very passionate about helping every kid.

The elementary schools in TRSD all serve different populations in regard to ethnicity and socioeconomic status. Therefore, multiple teachers said they chose to teach at OCES instead of another nearby school with a different population.

As I spoke with teachers, I got the sense that they really do care about the students they serve. This especially came across as they shared how their experiences with professional learning have impacted their teaching and, in effect, their students. In regard to the growth her students made, Lola said with pride, “It makes me happy. They’ve worked hard.” Violet noted, “Everybody is just so focused on student success . . . everybody is willing to help out and to be there and it’s all about the kids. Everything is really about the kids.”

Professional Learning Supports Student Needs

The professional learning was directly aligned with the needs of the OCES students. With 73% of the students identified as second language learners, the focus on Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol strategies this year was intentional to support the students. According to Erika, the leadership team is “continuing to bring in professional development that best meets the needs of the kids in our school.”

Matilda supplied more detail about the focus on the students:

The PLC time has been a lot of different things, but this year it has really been focusing on new learning through the SIOP [Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol] model. Then it is also a chance . . . sometimes . . . where we’re really just looking at our data and how kids are doing and how kids are responding to the instruction that we’re giving them.

Sara explained the reason for the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol strategies during PLC time:

Our school-wide focus this year is on language. It’s one of the things that our superintendent is all about, global-ready skills. [Communication is] one of the

global-ready skills that we felt our school would be able to focus on . . . because our demographics of kids are so low and behind that speaking a complete sentence, whether they're 6 years old or 10 years old, is very difficult. And so we've decided that as a school we will focus on communication. And so in professional development no matter where we're at, we're always talking about language and how to better it and it's been really cool to focus on that.

However, the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol strategies do not just support the second language learners. The teachers saw evidence of the tools being good for all kids and helped their academically strong kids show growth. Sara originally worried about how much the native English speakers would benefit from the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol strategies. By the end of the school year, Sara reflected on their growth. "I feel like my non-ELLs [English language learners] . . . are growing at the same or higher rate." The content of professional learning aligns to the needs and supports all students in the community.

Family Involvement

The staff embraces and welcomes the students' families into the school and the educational process. In addition to back-to-school nights and conferences, OCES provides opportunities throughout the year for families to spend time in the school to help them feel like it is their school. Eleanor said that the principal "over the years has looked into involving community members . . . especially our parents who may not . . . [think] that school is a good thing, and so trying to make it welcoming to them." Literacy and math/science nights are held during the school year. In the case of math/science night, students show off their math or science projects to their families and then everyone visits different classrooms for age appropriate math and science activities they can do with their families, some of which they can take home to continue building their skills. The turnout for these events is high, with families lured

to the school with the promise of dinner and sometimes a raffle for a prize such as an iPad. The intention Eleanor spoke of seems to be working. Families seemed happy to be there—smiles on faces, laughter among circles of friends old and young as children scurried around generations of families to each classroom.

Parents are seen as part of the team to help educate the whole child. Erika described how teachers go beyond the limits of their classroom to support students. Teachers will reach out to parents and explain where their student is performing compared to where the student should be. Lola felt it was important to build a relationship with the parents to help build trust and to help the parents support their children at home.

Three themes emerged during the data collection: the importance of quality leadership, embedding professional learning in a learning organization, and a focus on the community. These themes came to the surface mainly through the observation of school events and individual interviews with staff members. The interviews were also a critical component in answering the research questions.

Answering the Research Questions

The following research questions have guided this study:

- Q1 What factors contribute to one academically successful, ethnically and socioeconomically diverse elementary school?
- Q2 What characteristics of professional learning are present in one academically successful, ethnically and socioeconomically diverse elementary school?
- Q3 How do teachers in one academically successful, ethnically and socioeconomically diverse elementary school perceive the impact of professional learning on teaching practices?

Research Question Q1

As mentioned earlier in Chapter IV, the leadership demonstrated by the principal of OCES is an important factor contributing to the success of the school. In addition to the evidence already provided, Gissell felt the “leadership has a really great vision for the school and therefore all teachers meet that expectation.” That vision included the philosophy that “these are all our kids,” as mentioned by multiple teachers. Matilda added that by hiring a passionate group of teachers, the principal has “created this culture of high expectations and collaboration and community.” Erika explained how the principal had created a culture of collaboration by involving people in the decision-making process when appropriate, which has helped teams build relationships. In addition to setting high expectations, Isadora commented that the principal is respectful and “treats everyone equitably,” helping her to feel honored as a professional.

A majority of those interviewed also mentioned professional learning as contributing to the school’s success. Of those who mentioned professional learning, four of the teachers were teaching at the school when the award was won, and one teacher taught previously in another school district before moving to OCES. The teachers appreciated the sense of community the program created and the content of professional learning.

Teachers spoke to how the professional learning activities create a sense of community for the teachers. Johann explained how the groups are organized:

I think the way our [PLC] groups are designed, the grade level teams that meet together, they form a team, and even the specialist group, we form a team. Our goals are very different from what the grade level teams are, but I think we form little teams within the building. I think that kind of helps.

Teachers have the opportunity to talk to and work with each other. Lola appreciated that “we spend time working together, and we have that opportunity to sit down together and say, ‘I notice this isn’t working with my group of kids; what can we do?’” Isadora felt that the focus on teams and collaboration was a result of the professional learning structures, but also due to the work of the principal who “really encourages working together as a team.” Matilda observed that having professional learning scheduled into the school day “helps us have time to get together and collaborate and talk about kids and have that sense of community.”

Teachers were also thankful for the content provided during professional learning. Sara commented that they had focused on topics such as the formative assessment process that has helped the school be successful. She also explained that as a new teacher the structure was beneficial. “When I first came in I felt like [the instructional coaches] were really helpful teaching me as a first-year teacher and kind of keeping me under their wing and just checking on me.” Lola liked the opportunity to spend time looking at data and said that the attention to strategies to support English language learners students, such as Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol has been helpful as a teacher new to the school. She shared her experience:

For me personally, I came from a school that didn’t have a whole lot of ELL [English language learners] learners and . . . we’ve really focused on SIOP [Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol] strategies this year, and that’s helped me be a better instructor for my English language learners. . . . For me, that’s been a big area of growth.

Matilda spoke to the addition of the lesson study and how it has helped teachers think deeper about a lesson to make it better. Both the content and opportunities to build community are pieces that teachers felt helped make their school successful in addition to the leadership of the principal.

Research Question Q2

The professional learning practices of OCES were so embedded in the culture of the school that, at times, it was difficult to distinguish what is unique about the program. It was helpful to return to the literature review to identify which characteristics of effective professional learning were present in OCES's program at the time of the study. The practices observed evolved from years of trial and error and a focus on what teachers need to support students' growth.

Identified in Table 3 are the characteristics of effective professional learning that were present at OCES. Many of the characteristics and how they apply to OCES have already been addressed in Chapter IV; therefore, it would be repetitive to speak to the characteristics that were visible during the data collection process. Instead, details will be shared about the characteristics not yet a part of the culture. For each of the components from Table 3 not marked present, there was still some evidence of the practice or a communicated hope for future inclusion in the program. Remarkably, all but two characteristics of effective professional learning were strongly present in OCES's program.

Honors teachers as professionals. In some aspects, teachers are honored as professionals. It was recognized that they work hard, they trust each other, and learn from each other; however, they were not always treated as experts in their field (Armstrong, 2006; Sahlberg, 2011). Some teachers mentioned that the professional learning practices, including the opportunity for coaching and the content, did not always meet their needs, especially as veteran teachers.

Table 3

Characteristics of Effective Professional Learning Present at Owl Crest Elementary School

Characteristic	Owl Crest Elementary School
Challenges previously held beliefs	X
Classroom application	X
Clear, aligned goals	X
Collaborative	X
Effective resource use	X
Engages teachers in the learning process	X
Focus on content/standards	X
Focus on pedagogy	X
Honors teachers as professionals	
Inquiry-based	X
Ongoing	X
Participant-driven	
Reflective	X
Student -focused	X
Supportive leadership	X
Supportive structures	X

Teachers commented on they wished for more coaching and co-teaching opportunities, while others who were benefiting from the individual time with instructional coaches were appreciative. Isadora felt there was a need for “more man-hours so more people could come in and coach and team-teach.” She continued on, “I really like what we do now, we just don’t have enough manpower or hours for our leadership team to be as effective as they could be.” From Sara’s perspective, this was because mentor teachers spent more time working with teachers who needed more support. Sara said, in reference to the mentor teachers:

I feel like they focus a lot on the teachers that need it the most, which is probably a good thing, but with teachers that don’t need it as much, maybe they’re not getting the attention they should, or maybe they’re not growing to be even better. “You’re a good teacher so we’re not really going to stop in your room; we know what you’re doing is great.” But why not make me the best? Why not give me ideas, not just focus on teachers that really need help?

In this sense, Sara did not benefit for being a strong teacher or expert. Erika, the instructional coach, reflected, “We do have teachers that we may focus on and it may be a brand new teacher . . . and we’ll look at the data and say, ‘What can we do to help this teacher help the kids?’” Lola sensed that she had been lucky to have frequent opportunities to have coaching with a mentor teacher and co-teach multiple days a week with a specialist teacher.

The content of some of the professional learning did not align with the teachers’ needs, preventing them from being treated as experts in their field. Multiple teachers stated that the content did not apply to them or was repetitive. “I feel like strategies are great, but they get redundant after a while,” according to Violet. Sara made a similar comment, “I feel like a lot of the stuff that we learn, perhaps we already know.” Johann desired more professional learning that applied to her as a

specialist teacher and as the only teacher in her content area in the building. She was able to appreciate that other teachers in the building were able to improve their teaching from the professional learning, but to her, it was a waste of time. This year the school district provided 14 days professional learning for specialist teachers in her content area; however, she was not excused from the OCES PLC time. There was a similar frustration from teachers who were not math teachers but were required to attend the math grant PLC. Erika knew this was an issue and the administration is problem solving the issue. “I never want professional development to be a waste of time . . . I want it to be meaningful,” she said.

Participant-driven. The current professional learning program at OCES is not yet completely participant-driven. This is a deeply embedded piece of the culture, a remnant of the previous top-down professional learning program. The principal and instructional coaches are still responsible for the direction, creation, and dissemination of most of the professional learning content.

The instructional leadership team identifies the focus of professional learning for the school year. While mentor teachers did have a role in this process each August, teachers not involved in a leadership role were not included in the process. According to Eleanor, one of the mentor teachers, after the initial August planning of the yearly direction and goals, the instructional coaches are responsible for the weekly planning.

At this time, the instructional coaches determined the needs of teachers and led the PLCs. Erika would like to see professional learning become more participant-driven. She commented that teachers on staff may have more expertise than her in a given area, but teachers are hesitant to step forward and lead a PLC meeting:

I'd love for some teachers to take the lead. When I see some awesome things . . . let's use technology for example . . . classroom teachers doing this awesome stuff on this technology. . . . "Can you be a professional development person this week?" But to build that capacity of empowering frontline educators . . . all doing great things in the classroom . . . I'd want to see classroom teachers be a part of that . . . I can try [a strategy], I can do it, I can share it and bring it in [to PLC] . . . and bring all of the research behind it, but I know someone over here is a master at it.

It is unclear if teachers are reluctant to facilitate PLC due to a lack of confidence in their ability to lead, not enough time to plan for PLC in addition to planning for their classroom responsibilities, or a sense that it is the responsibility of the instructional coaches since that is their job.

When asked if the professional learning program was evaluated, most teachers mentioned that there was a survey that took place in past years. There was not an evaluation of the program the year this study took place. Teachers reported that the results of the survey were not shared with them, nor did they receive feedback about how the program is being improved based on their comments. Evaluations of the professional learning program would provide opportunities for teachers to share how the program could best meet their needs.

Overall, many aspects of the OCES professional learning program align with the best practices in professional learning. Improvements can be made to honor teachers as professionals and have teachers drive the direction and activities of the program. The teachers at OCES will continue to evolve the program, especially as TRSD begins to implement the next incarnation of professional learning and teacher leadership, scheduled to begin during the 2017-2018 school year. One of the hopes of the upcoming teacher leadership model is to "empower frontline educators" to have

more of a role in creating and sharing their experience and expertise through the professional learning structures.

Research Question Q3

The teachers' perceptions of the impact of professional learning at OCES were overall positive. As mentioned earlier, everyone interviewed was able to give examples of how the professional learning practices had impacted their teaching. Interestingly, when interviewees were asked how professional learning has impacted them and what evidence they had, the question had to be reframed to help multiple teachers focus specifically on what they had learned during the professional learning structures offered, not what they already knew about teaching.

First, to ensure everyone interviewed had the same understanding of the concept, interviewees were asked to define professional learning. Everyone was able to give a response similar to the definitions found in the literature. Johann, a specialist teacher, made some interesting distinctions about what is and what is not professional learning:

I think professional development is when you're learning something about your profession, what you do. . . . What we were doing today . . . that's working on some [end of year calendar] nuts and bolts. That's working on the logistics of stuff that needs to be done, and that isn't professional development. Sometimes we go in there and they talk to us about being a better math teacher. Okay, that's great and it's interesting and I loved it but I don't consider that professional development. That isn't my profession; that isn't what I want to do, I'm never going to do that. I might help some kids with math, but I still don't consider that professional development for me.

It was important to be able to distinguish whether a response to other interview questions was a misunderstanding of the concept of professional learning or a matter of perception.

Those interviewed were able to identify ways in which the professional learning impacted teaching and/or student learning. Some teachers gave examples in which they had used both quantitative and anecdotal data to determine the positive impact of the professional learning this year. Matilda shared the following experience observing teachers:

I went around . . . in two classrooms I actually filled out the SIOP [Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol] teacher checklist of all the components; pre and post, to see what strategies were already present from the . . . beginning of the year. I really saw growth. I saw a lot of teachers taking ownership, both for the two teachers that I actually did the checklist and then anecdotally . . . [the SIOP strategies] made a difference.

Violet also used quantitative data as evidence of her students' growth:

Working with a mostly Latino population is something new to me. Where I taught before it was really 99.9% White, very affluent, so this was definitely, career-wise, a challenge for me, which is nice. Because I haven't worked with this population, the professional learning that we've had has been good because it does give me strategies to work on. . . . Those strategies are clearly working because I'm using those strategies in my daily teaching. It's really helping the students, and you can tell that by them meeting their NWEA [Northwest Evaluation Association] goals in reading and language usage. That's how I can tell . . . I didn't use the SIOP [Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol] strategies before because I didn't have a population who needed it; whereas, here I do, so those strategies are helping.

Gissell witnessed growth in her teaching, which changed her students' behaviors:

I feel like discussing [communication] has reached my teaching to a whole new level . . . I knew, yeah, kids need vocabulary . . . but I'd never thought about how to set that high expectation for them and give them those really difficult words and expect that they know how to use those when they speak. So, all this learning has benefitted me greatly and my students, I think. They go back and forth, they use formal answers, and they use vocabulary from what I've taught them and so being able to use those complete sentences and communicate. And so I've seen that this year. With the data, simply, I've seen growth of students growing throughout the year. That would be the evidence.

Lola described how her students performed this year compared to last year, before the focus on Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol strategies:

This group [of students] is significantly lower than my group last year, but they came to me significantly lower. When I look at how many of them have shown steady, consistent growth through the year, there are more of them. Even my [academically] high kids . . . I had kids who came in high, and those high kids are still continuing to grow, which I think is from those SIOP [Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol] strategies that we've learned. They're good for all kids. They're helping the high kids and the kids who struggle. They're not just beneficial for grade level or struggling kids. They may not end the year where my group last year was, but their amount of growth, from where they started because they were so much lower, they've closed that gap more.

Johann did not have an example of professional development from the OCES that had impacted her teaching, but she was excited to be able to share her experiences from the professional learning program that involved teachers from across the school district:

I was able to use some of the ideas that I picked up and the kids liked it, they were engaged in some of the things that were new to me and some of the ideas and things that I'd been doing that nobody else knew, I was able to share ideas with them and they have told me that, "Wow, that's really a great way to teach that, I never would've thought of that."

As a researcher and professional, it was valuable to see that even when teachers had issues or complaints about certain aspects of the program, they were still able to identify how what they were learning was impacting them and their students. The variety of structures in place including PLC, lesson study, and co-teaching, along with the expectations for collaboration and participation established by the principal, help make professional learning productive for the grade-level teachers at OCES.

Conclusion

This research study has allowed for a deeper look into the practices of an academically successful, ethnically and socioeconomically diverse elementary school. Three important themes were uncovered during the process: the importance of quality

leadership, embedding professional learning in a learning organization, and a focus on the community. These themes will be compared to the literature in Chapter V.

Clarity was also reached in regard to the research questions. The leadership demonstrated by the principal and the professional learning practices are the two factors discussed by participants that contributed to the school's success. The OCES demonstrated all but two characteristics, honoring teachers as professionals and participant-driven practices, of effective professional learning. Teachers perceive the professional learning practices as impacting their teaching and student learning. Chapter V will address the implications of these findings.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The opportunity to think deeply about the findings of the data collection in Chapter IV resulted in the identification of three themes: the importance of quality leadership, embedding professional learning in a learning organization, and a focus on the community. The research questions were also answered. The leadership demonstrated by the principal and the professional learning practices were the two factors that contributed to the school's success. Owl Crest Elementary School (OCES) demonstrated all but two characteristics of effective professional learning, and teachers perceived the professional learning practices as impacting their teaching and student learning. In Chapter V the findings from Chapter IV will be connected to the literature and the implications of these findings will be addressed. Additionally, I will make recommendations to future leaders, provide recommendations for future research, and share my reflections.

Connecting the Findings to the Literature

I was particularly interested in how the information in the literature review connected to the three themes. Upon further study, the professional learning program at OCES highly aligns with the content of the literature review. Not only was I looking for areas where the data aligned with the literature but also where the practices

of OCES are not present or supported by the literature. The themes identified have been shown to be effective across different student populations.

The Importance of Quality Leadership

The importance of quality leadership was an essential factor according to the data analysis. The principal was a vital element in the success of the school and professional learning program. This literature review did not focus on factors that contribute to school success. However, 10 of the sources in Table 1 identified supportive leadership as an important characteristic of effective professional learning, which tied as the third most commonly reported characteristic. The literature acknowledged the importance of shared leadership (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012; DuFour et al., 2005), a philosophy present at OCES. A future step for the principal of OCES will be to continue refining the culture of shared leadership. All teachers, not just instructional coaches, should learn how to facilitate adult learning activities such as professional learning communities (PLCs) (Easton, 2008). Additionally, teachers can be encouraged to help identify the focus of the instruction along with the administration (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). This would help increase buy-in for teachers who felt that professional learning did not apply to what they teach or was repetitive based on their previous experiences.

Embedding Professional Learning in a Learning Organization

Characteristics of effective professional learning were particularly evident and embedded in the learning organization at OCES. Not only were the characteristics visible, but also many of the other research-based elements of professional learning were present. Professional learning was presented at OCES using a face-to-face

delivery model within the individual school environment (Hargreaves, 2014). No longer a part of a top-down model, professional learning was created by teacher leaders in the school and job-embedded as part of teachers' role as professionals (Easton, 2008; Wiggins & McTighe, 2007).

In alignment with the research, teachers met weekly for professional learning (Darling-Hammond, 2010). This time was used to support teachers with content knowledge and instructional strategies (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Borko, 2004; Garet et al., 2001). Teachers received support in understanding the new standards and curriculum (Vogel, 2010). With a strong focus on student data, professional learning provided teachers with the opportunity to learn about their students' academic needs (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 1996). Surprisingly, there was no evidence of time being used to address teachers' beliefs about race or work toward eliminating subtle and overt racial biases in schools through the data collection process (Singleton & Linton, 2006), if this was even necessary.

The professional learning program at OCES followed constructivist theory, allowing teachers to practice and then reflect on what they learned and how it would be incorporated into the classroom (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 1996; Glickman et al., 2005; Gulamhussein, 2013; Rohlwing & Spelman, 2014). Due to the variations in teacher experiences, the professional learning needs to be differentiated to support the staff (Danielson & McGreal, 2000). Differentiation would align with adult learning theory and increase the likelihood of knowledge transfer into the classroom for all teachers (Rohlwing & Spelman, 2014).

As I collected data for this study, I observed that the staff referred to the Thursday meeting as a PLC, and I was curious if the practices at OCES aligned with

the literature about true PLCs. As mentioned in Chapter I, the term PLC is frequently overused, making it ubiquitous (Fullan, 2006). From my observations, the PLC meets all of the guidelines detailed in the literature review expect for collaboration. While the culture of collaboration is very strong within the school, there is not collaboration in the creation and delivery of professional learning. The principal and instructional coaches guide practice, a reminder of the previous top-down professional learning program that was previously created by the school district. From conversations with three of the teachers, I inferred that teachers were not able to question practices, a requirement of PLCs (DuFour, 2004). It will take time for the staff to transition from a top-down professional learning program to a true PLC model.

A Focus on the Community

In contrast to the gap in the literature in regard to supporting ethnically and socioeconomically diverse populations through professional learning, certain aspects of the OCES program stood out as unique to this program. The focus on the research-based Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol strategies is something that would not be a need in a school with a native English speaking student population. Especially for teachers new to working with this population, this was a very beneficial focus. In the past, professional development concentrated on other high leverage teaching strategies such as the formative assessment process, along with all of the other teachers in the school district, no matter the student population. The focus on Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol strategies was selected intentionally for the OCES population.

Even though there was a focus on teaching strategies, there was not a focus on cultural education for teachers. During the research window, there was no evidence of

training used to bring awareness to teachers' beliefs about race or work towards eliminating subtle and overt racial biases in schools (Singleton & Linton, 2006). As previously mentioned, all of the teachers appeared to be White and middle class, both cultural differences compared to many of their students who were Latino and living in poverty. Lola said that a friend of hers who is a first generation Latina had told her about some of the cultural differences of which Lola needed to be aware. Cultural differences, including the culture of poverty, should be addressed by cultural education through the professional learning structures.

It must be remembered that OCES was only in the second year of being able to build on and design a professional learning program to meet the needs of the staff and students. Areas in which the program did not align with the literature are perhaps more a comment on the history of the previous program from the school district and less the intentions of the instructional leadership team. The upcoming section providing recommendations for future leaders can serve as a reference as OCES leaders work to perfect the professional learning program.

Implications

In light of the findings of this research, multiple implications have risen to the surface. To create a successful program, various elements had to come into alignment. Leadership, policy, and the use of resources are required to replicate a quality professional learning program like the one found at OCES.

The first implication of the findings is that professional learning programs require strong and supportive leaders who can foster positive work environments. The importance of quality leadership emerged as both a theme and an answer to the first research question. If the principal did not support the professional learning program,

perhaps more teachers would just complete the actions without buying into the passion and enthusiasm that the principal exuded. While the focus of this research was at the school level, strong leadership and support of professional learning was also required from the school district leadership team. The leadership team of Tree Ridge School District (TRSD) supported professional learning and had included it as a part of the school district's strategic plan. If school and school district leaders want to create authentic professional learning programs that impact student learning, professional learning needs to be an honest priority.

A second implication is that schools need to have the flexibility to create professional learning programs that meet the needs of their teachers and students. Due to the size and demographics of the TRSD, OCES benefits from the autonomy to design a program that works for them. Teachers commented about how meeting with teachers from other schools was not always beneficial because of the different student demographics. Sara referenced an experience analyzing student work with teachers from another school in the school district:

I was stuck with a bunch of teachers from [another] school with a totally different demographic. They're talking about how they're starting off the year writing essays and we're trying to figure out how to write a paragraph and sentence structure here in fifth grade.

Teachers, even though they are in the same school district, serve students with different needs. The capability for school flexibility begins at the national level, is reinforced at the state level, and filters to the local level. Whether working with an ethnically and socioeconomically diverse, at-risk, or affluent student population, schools need to be able to determine the direction of their professional learning programs to meet their identified needs.

The final implication gleaned from the findings is that schools and school districts need to be willing to invest resources in professional learning structures such as time for weekly meetings. The professional learning program at OCES required more than the principal just setting aside money for teachers to attend an annual conference. At the school district level, funding has been marked for salaries for a director and two instructional coaches, along with money for resources and presenters. At the school level, resource use is a bit more complicated. Instructional coaches and mentor teachers are paid from the pool of teachers' salaries even though they do not have a full teaching load. Additionally, the school district provides a financial stipend for the teacher leaders. Each instructional coach increases the number of students per classroom teacher. As part of the instructional coach and mentor teachers' responsibilities, they spend a percentage of their contract day leading professional learning and coaching teachers, taking time away from their teaching of students, all which can be labeled with a cost. Just as with the district level, each school is given a budget for professional learning resources that includes materials and books. School districts need to weigh the cost with the benefits. Then, they must commit to and be able to communicate the impact of professional learning when allocating resources. Creating an effective professional learning program requires multiple years to embed the practices into the culture.

Recommendations to Leaders

As mentioned in Chapter I, the purpose of this study was to uncover practices that would provide support to current and future leaders of schools and professional learning based on the experiences at one elementary school in Colorado. Through this process I have learned a great amount about professional learning practices and, in

particular, about the practices of one school with an ethnically and socioeconomically diverse student population, a population that is on the rise in Colorado. The OCES had created a very strong and impactful professional learning program based on teachers' reflections of how the program had impacted their students. Using what had already been shared about the professional learning program at OCES as a foundation, the following are recommendations for current and future leaders to improve upon practice.

Before jumping into the recommendations, leaders need to keep in mind that there is no perfect program. Even though teachers stated they were highly or mostly satisfied with the professional learning program and OCES, all but one teacher was still able to provide suggestions about how to improve the program. For example, while one teacher wanted more group planning time, another wanted less. Leaders can strive to individualize professional learning as much as possible, but in the situations where everyone's needs cannot be met, leaders need to return to the vision and goals. It is important for leaders to maintain open communication with staff so that teachers understand the leader's decisions in hopes of maintaining buy-in in the program.

The first recommendation is that, just as teachers strive to differentiate their classrooms, leaders need to individualize professional learning for teachers to a point that the system can maintain. The teachers at OCES all brought different levels of experience to the PLC, and this needs to be honored in more ways than just offering multiple strategies for teachers to try. Leadership commented that veteran teachers were not using strategies they had learned in the earlier years of the professional learning program or could try to use a previously learned strategy in teaching a different content to students as a justification of repeated content for some teachers.

Isadora recommended creating a handout of the strategies that teachers could reference so they do not forget what was learned each year. In situations where teachers have already been exposed to the content, in this case Sheltered Instructional Observation Protocol strategies, consider providing the teachers with a list of the learned strategies as a reminder for them to use in their classroom and then move onto another area of need for the experienced teacher.

Individualize professional learning for new teachers and veteran teachers. At OCES, multiple teachers had already learned the Sheltered Instructional Observation Protocol strategies from previous years of professional development and/or master's degree programs. Teachers new to working with this population found the information incredibly valuable. Another area of focus for new teachers would be to provide cultural information that is relevant to the particular population. This may require only one professional learning session. Honor those teachers who are experts and ask them to share their experiences with those new to the staff or provide new more complex content to veteran teachers.

Professional learning also needs to be differentiated for specialist teachers. It seemed that this was something that would be appropriate to come from the school district level, since in a school this size there was only one teacher per content area. Johann was so appreciative of the professional learning she received with other teachers in her content area district-wide. She learned from other teachers and was proud of what she was able to contribute to the conversation and share with other teachers. When specialist teachers are required to attend district-wide professional learning for their content area, they should be excused from professional learning in their school to honor their time and keep professional learning relevant.

Another frequent comment from teachers was in regard to the requirement of all grade-level teachers attending the math grant professional learning. In this situation, the teachers did not buy-in to the leadership's explanation of why everyone needed to attend. Non-math teachers were told that they needed to attend the math-focused PLC so everyone understood what everyone else was teaching. In exchange, math teachers were required to help the writing teachers grade the school district writing assessments. In the case of the math content, it seemed as though relevant information could be shared with the writing teachers in a way that better honored their time. Additionally, a math teacher commented that she was nervous grading the writing assessments, afraid that if she scored it incorrectly it could negatively impact the student's learning. Leaders need to find the balance between everyone having the same information and teachers becoming experts in their content area.

Another recommendation to honor teachers' time is to eliminate non-professional development content from the PLC time. In the PLCs observed, approximately 30 of the 90 minutes were spent on business that could be communicated to teachers through e-mail. While some of the content, such as a discussion about placing students in classes for next year, did elicit teacher comments, this was a discussion that would be more appropriate during a staff meeting or could take place electronically through the use of a Google Doc. By eliminating this content from the PLC, the PLC could be shortened to 60 minutes, giving teachers more time for individual or group planning time using the strategies learned in the PLC. Upper grade teachers desired more time to meet with other teachers teaching the same content area. By reducing PLC to 60 or 70 minutes, teachers would have some additional time to meet with their content area teachers.

As OCES works to improve on practices already in place, another recommendation is to move towards making the PLC a true PLC where teachers have opportunities to collaborate and help facilitate the content of the learning. As discussed earlier, this is a piece that will take time to embed in the culture. Leaders can begin the practice slowly, asking a few teachers to share their expertise. Instructional coaches can work with volunteer teachers to help them prepare the content for PLC to reduce the perception that teachers have “something else on their plate” or that it is just the instructional coach’s job. By having other teachers share their experiences, the leadership team will build capacity of the teachers and transition to a culture where all teachers can be experts, not just the instructional coaches. Another method for increasing teacher expertise is to return to the practice of completing “walk-throughs” where teachers observe another teacher in action in the classroom and then reflect on what they saw. This increase in shared leadership will also help transition the staff to the upcoming changes in the teacher leadership model, due to begin with the 2017-2018 school year.

Another method for creating a truer PLC is to allow teachers to have more of a voice and choice in the professional learning content. It is possible to maintain alignment with school district and school goals while honoring teachers’ needs as they apply to those goals. Again, this is something that can be implemented gradually to help teachers adjust to the new philosophy. One way to determine what content teachers desire during professional learning is through an evaluation of the program. Teachers commented that in past years there was a survey given. Teachers did not get feedback about the results of the survey or how their comments were being used to improve the program. The year this study was completed, there was not evaluation of

the program. The results of this study will be used to provide the leadership team with feedback that can be used to improve the program. As the interviews provided an opportunity for reflection for many of those who participated in the conversations, hopefully they saw this as a way to evaluate aspects of the program. It is recommended that a formal, research-based evaluation be completed in the future.

Upon reflection, the leadership team at OCES has created a productive professional development model. My hope is that my recommendations honor and highlight the quality of the model that they have in place. It is not a matter of instituting a major shift in practice but finely tuning what they are already doing.

Limitations of the Study

There are multiple limitations of this study. A major focus of this study was on professional learning practices. There are multiple factors that lead to academic success with professional learning being just one (Hattie, 2009; Marzano et al., 2005). It was not clear before the start of this study if the professional learning practices were a factor in the success of the selected school. Due to my interest in professional learning, which was explained in Chapter III, I was curious if teachers and teacher leaders would identify professional learning as an element that has led to the school's success. I was also interested to observe professional learning practices in a school that had been identified as successful.

Because this is a case study, I am only able to comment on professional learning practices in one school. However, I have made observations based on the findings that could apply to schools with a similar student population (Yin, 2009). My hope is that the findings will provide insight to the school's leadership team, the school district's professional learning departments, and other school leaders working

with a high Latino and socioeconomically diverse student population, as well as other diverse populations.

Another limitation is that this study was focused on an elementary school. There might be practices observed that would not easily transfer to another school, such as a secondary school, due to staff size, school district requirements, budget concerns, or scheduling constraints. Schools leaders can identify the practices from the findings that will have the most impact in their schools and are realistic for them to implement in their own school contexts.

The final limitation was the short period of time for data collection. Originally, the plan was for the data collection to take place over four months instead of two months. This would have allowed for the gathering of data during both spring and fall professional learning activities. It then came to my attention that the school district was evaluating their teacher leadership structure and potentially making changes that would impact professional learning in the fall. Once changes had already been made to my research plan, I learned that the school district was waiting one year to implement the changes. Since the change regarding the time period for the study had already been approved, the timeframe remained two months.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this research, while providing some clarity, also reinforce the need for continued research in the field of professional learning. A focus of this study was on professional learning practices in a school with an ethnically and socioeconomically diverse population. Since this was a case study focusing on one school, additional studies would be beneficial to support or refute these findings. Much of the focus of professional learning at OCES was on the second language

learners and did not address the needs of students living in poverty, which would also be an area of inquiry into specific strategies to support those students. Another focus of this study was the teachers' perceptions of the impact of the professional learning program. However, much of what teachers shared was in regard to their perceptions of the structures and programs for professional learning, another possible research topic. It would be interesting to find out if the teachers' perceptions of the impact of professional learning would change if they had positive or negative perceptions of the structures and programs. It would also be beneficial for researchers to study more about the impact of top-down professional development models in comparison to individualized professional development and the impact of teachers' sense of self-efficacy. Finally, it is valuable to be able to discuss the use of resources advocating for professional development programs. It would be helpful to learn from school districts that were able to maintain an appropriate and consistent level of funding during the years, such as those that were experienced after the economic recession of 2008. Since professional learning is often one of the first programs cut when there is lack of funding.

Researcher's Reflections

As a first time researcher, I was surprised by how much I enjoyed the data collection process. Being in the school and listening to teachers reinforced my passion and interest in the field of professional learning. It was eye-opening to spend time in an elementary school to observe the logistics and culture of professional learning in a different type of school setting.

The knowledge I have gained from this research will benefit leaders and me as I move forward in my career. I can now speak from my observations and experiences

with a clearer picture about what professional learning can and should look like. I greatly enjoyed getting to know the staff at OCES and hope that I have honored their hard work and amazing school through this process.

Conclusion

Many of the professional learning practices at OCES align with the research presented in the literature review. Implications of the research came to light: professional learning programs require strong and supportive leadership, schools benefit from the flexibility to design a program to meet the needs of teachers and students, and there must be an investment in resources to maintain effective programs. While keeping in mind there is no perfect program, recommendations to leaders were made. Professional learning needs to be individualized for teachers. Leaders need to ensure content is relevant for all, including new, veteran, and specialist teachers, and honor teachers' time by focusing only on professional development activities. By working to create a truer PLC, teachers will have more opportunities for collaboration, creation, and presentation in the professional learning process. Finally, complete regular evaluations of the professional learning program to allow teachers to voice their opinions of the impact of the program and recommend content to meet their needs.

Professional learning is strongly embedded in the culture and structures of OCES, a school with an ethnically and socioeconomically diverse population. Guided by strong leadership, the content of professional learning is aligned to the needs of the teachers and students of the school. With the program's many positive attributes, school leaders working with diverse student populations can learn from the successes and challenges found at OCES.

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APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



Institutional Review Board

DATE: March 21, 2016

TO: Ashley Winnen
FROM: University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [881068-2] Professional Learning: Practices of a
Diverse and Successful Elementary School

SUBMISSION TYPE: Amendment/Modification

ACTION: APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE: March 21, 2016

EXPIRATION DATE: March 21, 2017

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB has APPROVED your submission. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on applicable federal regulations.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of March 21, 2017.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Sherry May at 970-351-1910 or Sherry.May@unco.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

Ashley -

Thank you for swiftly making the minor revisions requested. Your research is approved in the 'expedited' category and you may proceed with participant recruitment and data collection. Be sure to use all revised materials in this process.

Best wishes with your research and please don't hesitate to contact me with any IRB-related questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Dr. Megan Stellino, UNC IRB Co-Chair

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB's records.

APPENDIX B

**CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS
IN RESEARCH**

UNIVERSITY of
NORTHERN COLORADO



*College of Education and Behavioral Sciences
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies*

Consent Form for Human Participant in Research

Research Study Title: Professional learning: Practices of a diverse and successful elementary school

Researcher: Ashley Newman Winnen (xxx) xxx-xxxx
janewman4@gmail.com

Research Advisor: Dr. Linda R. Vogel (xxx) xxx-xxxx
linda.vogel@unco.edu

I am a graduate student at The University of Northern Colorado. I am interested in conducting research on how an academically successful, ethnically and socioeconomically diverse elementary school implements professional learning practices. You are invited to participate in this study because you have important views and experience with this topic. Your participation in the study is strictly voluntary.

This study will document experiences with professional learning practices in your school and school district. If you agree, you will be included in observations of relevant formal and informal professional learning activities such as school-wide events, team meetings, and coaching opportunities. These observations will take place between March 15, 2016 and May 27, 2016. Observations will be documented through the researcher's notes and reflections.

Every attempt will be made to maximize confidentiality. Your name or any other links to your identity will not be used in the study. Your comments and behaviors will be documented through notes and reflections made by the researcher. The notes will be stored in on a password-protected computer. Data, including interview recordings, consent forms, transcriptions, etc., will be stored on the UNC campus in a locked and secure location and will only be accessible to the researcher and research advisor named above.

You will be asked to give a pseudonym for use in any publications or presentations related to the study topics to be discussed in the interview regarding your understanding of professional learning practices. Your responses will be summarized and combined with others in the study to gain a deeper understanding of this topic. Your name will not appear in any professional report of this research.

This study and its' procedures have been approved by the UNC Institutional Review Board. Your participation poses no foreseeable risk and nothing beyond what might occur in normal daily conversation. Your participation may provide insight for you into your own beliefs about professional learning. Benefits of this study may include new knowledge and a better understanding of professional learning practices. This knowledge may be used to help school leaders advocate for and implement professional learning practices.

Participation in this research project is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study, and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having carefully read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns^[]_[] about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Sherry May, IRB Administrator, in the Office of Sponsored Programs, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO 80639: 970-351-1910.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT**DATE**

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER**DATE**

APPENDIX C

**CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS
IN FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEW PORTION
OF RESEARCH**

UNIVERSITY of
NORTHERN COLORADO



*College of Education and Behavioral Sciences
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies*

**Consent Form for Human Participants in Face-to-Face Interview Portion of
Research**

University of Northern Colorado (UNC)

Research Study Title: Professional learning: What happens in a diverse and successful elementary school

Researcher: Ashley Newman Winnen (xxx) xxx-xxxx
janewman4@gmail.com

Research Advisor: Dr. Linda R. Vogel (xxx) xxx-xxxx
linda.vogel@unco.edu

I am a graduate student at The University of Northern Colorado. I am interested in conducting research on how an academically successful, ethnically and socioeconomically diverse elementary school implements professional learning practices. You are invited to participate in this study because you have important views and experience with this topic. Your participation in the study is strictly voluntary.

This study will document experiences with professional learning practices in your school and school district. If you agree, you will be invited to participate in one individual, face-to-face digitally recorded interview, lasting approximately 60 minutes. This interview will contain approximately 10 questions focused around professional learning. The interview will take place at a location of your choice.

Every attempt will be made to maximize confidentiality. Your name or any other links to your identity will not be used in the study. Your interview responses will be digitally recorded and transcribed. The recordings and transcriptions will be stored in on a password-protected computer. Data, including interview recordings, consent forms, transcriptions, etc., will be stored on the UNC campus in a locked and secure location and will only be accessible to the researcher and research advisor named above.

You will be asked to give a pseudonym for use in any publications or presentations related to the study topics to be discussed in the regarding your understanding of professional learning practices. Your responses will be summarized and combined with others in the study to gain a deeper understanding of this topic. Your name will not appear in any professional report of this research.

This study and its' procedures have been approved by the UNC Institutional Review Board. Your participation poses no foreseeable risk and nothing beyond what might occur in normal daily conversation. Your participation may provide insight for you into your own beliefs about professional learning. Benefits of this study may include new knowledge and a better understanding of professional learning practices. This knowledge may be used to help school leaders advocate for and implement professional learning practices.

Participation in this research project is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study, and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having carefully read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns^[] about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Sherry May, IRB Administrator, in the Office of Sponsored Programs, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO 80639: 970-351-1910.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT**DATE**

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER**DATE**

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions

Date and time of interview: Location of interview:

Pseudonym:

Current Position: Other positions in this school or school district:

Years in current position: Years total in education:

Potential Interview Questions:

1. What elements do you think have contributed to this school's success? What evidence do you have to support your response?
2. How would you define professional learning? What are examples in your school or district?
3. Describe how professional learning occurs in your school.
4. Who is responsible for the creation of professional learning in your school?
5. What is your role and responsibility in the professional learning program?
6. Would you say the professional learning program at your school is effective?
7. What components make it effective? (Or if it is not effective, are there any effective components?) What evidence do you have to know it is effective or not?
8. What aspects of the professional learning program are unique to working with this particular student population (high SES, high Hispanic)?
9. How has professional learning in your school impacted you? What evidence do you have to support your response?
10. How is professional learning evaluated in your school? Do you know the results if it is evaluated? If it is evaluated, what is done with the results?
11. Describe any experiences with professional learning you have had that have been different from your current experiences.
12. If you could create your own model for professional learning for your school, what would it look like?
13. Is there anything else you would like to add about anything we have discussed?

APPENDIX E

OBSERVATIONAL PROTOCOL

Observational Protocol

Date and time of observation:

Location of observation:

Title of event:

<i>Descriptive Notes</i>	<i>Reflective Notes</i>

Based on Creswell (2013, p. 169)

APPENDIX F

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS TEMPLATE

Document Analysis Template

1. Type of document
 - ◇ Newspaper
 - ◇ Letter
 - ◇ Legislation
 - ◇ Memorandum
 - ◇ Map
 - ◇ Telegram
 - ◇ Press release
 - ◇ Report
 - ◇ Advertisement
 - ◇ Meeting minutes
 - ◇ Census report
 - ◇ Other (specify)
2. Unique physical qualities of the Document
 - ◇ Logo, letterhead
 - ◇ Handwritten
 - ◇ Typed
 - ◇ Seals
 - ◇ Notations
 - ◇ Stamps (date received)
 - ◇ Signature(s)
 - ◇ Other (specify)
3. Date(s) of document
Reference (for retrieval purposes)
4. Author (or creator) of the document
Position (title)
5. For what audience was the document written?
6. Analysis
 - a. List three key ideas/themes/issues identified in the document.
 - i.
 - ii.
 - iii.
 - b. Why was this document written and what evidence is there for this conclusion?
 - c. What questions are left unanswered by this document?
 - i.
 - ii.
 - iii.

From Fitzgerald (2012, p. 303)