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A Case Study of Communities of Practice in Schools

By

STEPHANIE KNIPP

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment

Of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

Seattle Pacific University

April 2019

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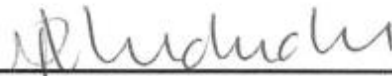April 2019

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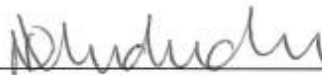NYARADZO MVUDUDU, Ed.D., Dean of Doctoral Programs

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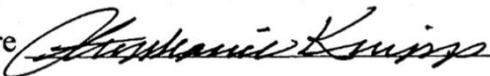
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Dedication

This study is dedicated to my husband, Jon, to my daughters, Natasha and Naomi, and to the rest of my family at home and at school. You piqued my curiosity and inspired my research.

"The openness of our hearts and minds can be measured by how wide we draw the circle of what we call family" (Mother Teresa).

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I would like to acknowledge the members of my doctoral dissertation committee for their support and encouragement over the past year.

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Dr. Bond, over the past ten years, you have served as a professor and advisor for me, and you have modeled strength, compassion, and grace as a leader in your words and deeds. I am so thankful I had the opportunity to learn from you.

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Abstract

This research is an examination of a community of practice, how it generates teacher social capital, and the implications for school leadership. Grounded in situated learning theory and social capital theory, this case study of teachers in a small school analyzes how communities of practice can generate teacher social capital, and how school leaders can help foster its growth. Situated learning theory is creating meaning from the real activities of daily living, and its implications for educational research and application are extensive. Developed by anthropologist Jean Lave and computer scientist Etienne Wenger in the 1990s, situated learning theory is grounded in John Dewey's pragmatism and Lev Vygotsky's social development theory. Situated learning theory is associated with social capital, legitimate peripheral participation, and communities of practice, and has fueled research and organizational and educational innovation for almost 30 years.

Keywords: Situated learning, *social capital*, *communities of learning*, *legitimate peripheral participation*, *social learning model*

Chapter One

Introduction

The supply of teachers in the 21st century is not keeping pace with demand both locally and globally (White & Smith, 2005). In the United States, more than $8 billion is spent annually on replacement costs due to high teacher turnover (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). This is not only an issue in the United States but is a broader international matter as well. There is concern among many nations based on a teacher shortage survey of 25 countries (e.g. Netherlands, Russia, Germany, and Sweden) regarding teacher recruitment and turnover, and some countries are faring better than others (White & Smith, 2005). Teacher shortage has been identified by the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a global problem affecting countries all over the world. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2013), 3.3 million teaching positions are needed to achieve universal primary education by 2030. At lower secondary levels, the corresponding numbers are 5.1 million by 2030. Attracting, recruiting, and retaining sufficient numbers of teachers is problematic (UNESCO, 2013).

Additionally, it has been more difficult for schools to find fully qualified teachers in some fields than in others, such as mathematics, science, and special education (Cowan, Goldhaber, Hayes, & Theobald, 2016; Podgursky, Ehlert, Lindsay, & Wan, 2016). Researchers have also noted difficulty in finding fully qualified teachers in schools serving larger proportions of students in poverty (Engel, Jacob, & Curran, 2014), and according to a Learning Policy Institute report, too many teachers are leaving the

workforce, potentially resulting in a future shortage (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016).

However, the initiatives of policymakers are often misguided in their focus on recruitment and retention efforts rather than a reconceptualization of professional learning through communities of practice (Cuddapah & Clayton, 2011). According to Sutcher, Darling-Hammond and Carver-Thomas (2016), retaining teachers would actually make a greater difference in balancing supply and demand than any other intervention. Considering that teachers who voluntarily leave the classroom list some areas of job dissatisfaction as very important or extremely important in their decision to leave the profession (Sutcher et al., 2016), fostering the social engagement of teachers can sustain mutual engagement (Wenger, 1998) and create a community where teachers will want to stay and grow in their practice. While increasing the teaching workforce may address the need for more teachers, the lens of situated learning theory may bring perspective to the social network of relationships in schools to help retain teachers through building social capital (Vorhaus, 2014).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine and describe how communities of practice, grounded in situated learning theory, generate teacher social capital. Through a qualitative approach, the researcher aimed to identify themes that may support school districts and building administrators as they grow the social capital of their teachers through communities of practice. Presented in this study are emerging themes from interviews with teachers regarding their perceptions of communities of practice and their impact on teacher social capital.

Key Definitions

Terminology associated with situated learning theory is connected and overlapping. The overarching concept of *social learning system* is that organizations are comprised of them and belonging to them occurs through social competence and personal experience (Wenger, 2000). Competence is historically and socially defined, and it is by "knowing" that competence is displayed within the community (Wenger, 2000). A *community of practice* falls within the broader conceptual framework of a social learning system, and is particularly concerned with the support of self-organizing groups of practitioners in their development and use of knowledge (Blackmore, 2010). Communities of practice, then, are essentially how people interact with each other, and thereby establish and grow their relationships with each other (Wenger, 1998).

Legitimate peripheral participation is the process by which those within a community of practice form the basis of learning and progress toward more advanced participation within the community (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Newcomers are exposed to the values of the community of practice through initial engagement along with the associated entry-level tasks and responsibility. As the newcomers' experience increases, they move past the periphery into the next trajectory by linking their past experiences with future possibilities of membership (Wenger, 1998). Wenger suggested that exposure to different trajectories is the greatest shaper of possibilities for newcomers (Wenger, 1998). These trajectories, then, affect social capital—including the relationships, resources of networks, norms or shared values to which individuals have access as community members. In turn, they have the potential for positive effects in a civil society (Cumming-Potvin & MacCallum, 2010).

Situated learning theory in education research using Etienne Wenger's communities of practice framework has implications for building social capital in schools. *Social capital*, or the idea that relationships are a valuable asset (Smith, 2009), is the investment in human resources which include networks, norms or shared values, and can be built through community participation within larger organizations (Cumming-Potvin & MacCallum, 2010). In context, social capital includes qualitative features that include relations between individuals and within communities (Vorhaus, 2014). As organizations such as school districts consider the social capital of teachers, they are met with the ever-increasing challenge of retaining teachers in the profession. Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of situated learning as noted by Cumming-Potvin and MacCallum (2010), "has emerged in the field of Education as a helpful entry point for researchers to understand the social and situational aspects of learning, in particular through the concept of community of practice" (p. 310).

Research Questions

The research questions in this study were designed to examine how communities of practice generate teacher social capital. More specifically, the researcher explored how teachers describe their community of practice through the lens of legitimate peripheral participation, how teachers connect their trajectory to social capital, and the implications for school leaders to grow social capital through communities of practice.

The first research question was as follows: How do teachers describe their community of practice? The second research question was as follows: How do communities of practice generate teacher social capital? The third question was as

follows: What are the implications for school leaders to grow teacher social capital through communities of practice?

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter One introduces the problem, the purpose, key definitions, and the research questions. Chapter Two includes the constructs of situated learning theory and social capital theory as well as a review of the literature. Chapter Three addresses the method of case study and the rationale for its use to address the research questions as well as its limitations. Chapter Four outlines the study findings and identifies the emergent themes from focus group interviews. Chapter Five analyzes these themes and attempts to answer the research questions based on the collected data.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Theoretical Constructs

In Chapter Two, the theoretical constructs and empirical research regarding situated learning and social capital are examined in the context of qualitative and quantitative studies. Through this chapter, the researcher provides a conceptual framework for this study.

Situated learning theory. Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger developed Situated Learning Theory in the 1990s and published *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* in 1991. Essentially, *situated learning* is a matter of creating meaning from the real activities of daily living (Stein, 1998), and is centered on the relationship between individuals and communities through engagement with their practice. For example, butchers working in a meat market, quilters making blankets together, or teachers collaborating in a school may come together in practice. This relational learning is usually unintentional rather than deliberate (Lave, 2009). Through the support provided by the community, knowledge is interpreted and distributed, but only through participation in the practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Following the work of Dewey's philosophy of pragmatism (Dewey, 1902) and Vygotsky's social development theory (Vygotsky, 1978), Lave (2009) advocated that active participation in a group, for example, is both a kind of action and belonging in which learning naturally takes place. As novices in a group move from the peripheral to its center, they become more active and engaged within the culture and eventually assume the role of expert. This idea is what Lave and Wenger (1991) called authentic and

the process of *legitimate peripheral participation*. While the ethnographic studies cited by Lave and Wenger did not specifically include classroom teachers, the mention of newcomers could potentially transfer to novice teachers (Cuddapah & Clayton, 2011).

Jean Lave, an American social anthropologist, became an advocate of *practice learning*, which is defined as participation in everyday life that may be thought of as a process of changing understanding in practice and resulting in learning (Lave, 2009). Lave wrote when looking closely at everyday activity, it is clear that learning is pervasive but often not recognized in ongoing activity (Lave, 2009).

Swiss native Etienne Wenger is a former researcher for the Institute for Research on Learning in Palo Alto, California, and previously studied computer science and wrote his dissertation on artificial intelligence. He is now a social learning theorist, researcher, author and consultant (Wenger, 2009; Wenger, 2010). Following the publication of *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, Wenger popularized the term, *communities of practice*, in his 1998 book, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*.

The premise behind the term, communities of practice, is the notion they are situated in all aspects of life and people are generally involved in several of them – whether that is at work, school, home, or in civic and leisure interests (Smith, 2009). Moreover, a community of practice involves more than technical knowledge or skill associated with undertaking a task. It is co-participating and is a social practice. Wenger traced the roots of community of practice to the social nature of human learning (Wenger, 2000).

Grounding their work in an anthropological approach, Lave and Wenger collected and interpreted empirical evidence on apprentices' learning and facilitated a conceptual shift from the traditional view of "the individual as learner to learning as participation in the social world, and from the concept of cognitive process to the more-encompassing view of social practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 43). Their ethnographic research on craft apprenticeship in traditional societies, including the Vai and Gola tailors in Liberia, the Yucatec midwives, and American meat-cutters, indicated that conceiving of apprenticeship simply in terms of 'learning by doing' in isolation provided an unsatisfactory account of the ordered way in which apprentices learned their craft. In addition, it did not do justice to what the authors were coming to perceive as the complex relational character of situated learning. Rather, members are involved in a set of relationships over time (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and communities develop around what is important to them (Wenger, 1998).

While the concept of community of practice is not derived from the tradition of systems theory, it aligns well with the perspective of systems (Wenger, 2010). For example, a community of practice itself can be viewed as a simple social system, and when combined with other interrelated communities of practice, it becomes complex (Blackmore, 2010). This social construct, when coupled with Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), asserted that learning is socially and linguistically mediated, and "is shaped by linguistic context, cultural norms, and social circumstances" (McClam & Diefenbacher, 2015, p. 132), and can be considered a social learning system (Wenger, 2010).

Communities of practice can also be seen as self-organizing systems or networks and have many of the benefits and characteristics that can be defined as *social capital*— the idea that relationships are a valuable asset (Smith, 2009). Vorhaus built on this notion that social capital provides access to institutional resources, but also extends to the levels of trust and related resources found in social networks. This context includes the qualitative features of relationships between individuals and within communities (Vorhaus, 2014).

A framework for understanding social learning systems creates structure grounded in theory. Wenger's social learning framework provides a theoretical lens and explains how context influences human social endeavors and generates practice, meaning, and identity through legitimate peripheral participation (Cuddapah & Clayton, 2011). He further explained this concept through the communities of practice *social learning model* (Wenger, 1998). The model consists of four components that are interconnected: *community* is the group formed through mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire. Through *practice,* those explicit and implied shared enterprises are sustained through mutual engagement in action. As a result, *meaning-making* occurs which results in the transformation that leads to *identity*, or the experience and process of becoming (Wenger, 1998). Together, Lave and Wenger set the stage for significant innovation through communities of practice within organizations, and more recently, in schools (Smith, 2009).

The literature on communities of practice has surged over the past decade, but the history of social learning systems and situational learning theory reaches back to the 1990s, indicating the current flurry of interest is truly a resurgence (Blackmore, 2010).

According to Blackmore, company reorganization, increased globalization, and subsequent mobility of people from job to job has contributed to the need to redefine professional communities and provide support for the more complex social, professional and personal needs of people (Blackmore, 2010).

Social capital theory. French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, is credited with the development of social capital theory (Dika & Singh, 2002). Bourdieu (1985), defined social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group" (p. 248). In Bourdieu's conceptualization, the amount of social capital available to a member is contingent on two elements: (1) the social relationship—the member's connection to the group, and (2) the quantity and quality of the resources possessed by the group.

Coleman (1988) further developed Bourdieu's theory stating that social capital facilitates productive activity through relationships. Social capital is not separate, but inherent in these relationships between and among individuals through three forms: (1) obligations and expectations which depend on trustworthiness of the social environment; (2) the flow of information within the social structure; and (3) the norms accompanied by sanctions that serve to promote stronger bonds within the community (Coleman, 1988, S119). Social capital is distinct from other forms of capital in that it serves the public good. The members who generate social capital ordinarily capture only a small part of its benefits.

Combining the ideas from Bourdieu (1985) and Coleman (1988), Lin (2001) defined social capital as the "resources embedded in a social structure that are accessed

and/or mobilized in purposive actions" (p. 29). Lin's definition captured key elements including the creation of value from relationships, available resources, the social network, and actions that mobilize resources. Lin's social capital definition is foundational to this study and is further developed by Minckler (2014). She defined teacher social capital as "the resources available to teachers by their social network membership to produce outcomes that are beneficial to teachers, their students, and ultimately to the school community" (p. 658). Teacher relationships, then, become a form of capital that is valuable to the school. These relationships have value to the individual when his or her associations accomplish two major goals: (1) helping the individual accomplish things he or she cannot do alone; and (2) satisfying the individual's belonging needs. Minckler's (2014) research also asserted that high levels of teacher social capital should result in positive outcomes of student achievement, teacher quality and teacher job satisfaction. The outcomes of teacher social capital, however, were outside the scope of this study. Instead, this research focused on the development of teacher social capital through communities of practice.

Empirical Research

This section included an overview of six studies that are grounded in the theoretical constructs of situated learning and social capital theory. A review of these studies constituted a survey and interpretation of theoretical books, articles and empirical research findings to prepare for undertaking further research on the subject (Vogt & Johnson, 2016). Through this literature review, the researcher became oriented within the theoretical constructs of situated learning and social capital.

Exploring a new teacher cohort. A 2011 qualitative study by Cuddapah and Clayton of beginning teachers used Wenger's social learning framework to examine how a professional development cohort can be a valuable resource and support for new teachers. Key findings and theoretical insights gained from the one year of observation of 22 cohort participants included the importance of the four components of Wenger's model. Data was measured through the analysis of documented anecdotal field notes from 16 two-hour sessions. The transcribed observations were analyzed through key framework codes and collected within a table of these Wenger codes. Findings included the centrality of the community component, and the implications of a community of practice comprised of solely novice members as most notable (Cuddapah & Clayton, 2011). While Cuddapah and Clayton asserted that novice cohorts can complement mentoring and induction programs, the periphery for legitimate participation in the community is altered. Integrated cultures, however, with teachers from a range of experience levels can provide support for teachers new to the profession (Johnson, 2007).

In a longitudinal project study by Johnson (2007), initial evidence suggested that new teachers working in these community of practice settings remained in their schools, and in public schools, teaching in higher proportions than did their counterparts in veteran-oriented or novice-oriented professional cultures. After four years, however, the 50 teachers studied made career choices that were consistent with national patterns: approximately one-third left teaching, one-third moved to new schools and positions in education, and one-third remained in their original school (Johnson, 2007).

Mentoring and social capital for 21st century communities of practice. Cumming-Potvin and MacCallum in a 2010 case study of intergenerational practice to

build social capital in Western Australia leveraged situated learning theory and the concept of communities of practice in an education setting. They examined the benefits and limitations of intergenerational practice and mentorship of students through a school volunteer program. Community volunteers, mainly adults over 50 years old, were paired with students and offered academic and life skills support for a ten-week period. The authors used several qualitative methods including consultations with participants via focus groups, semi-structured interviews, observations, and four case studies.

Their findings, through the analysis of comments by participants and observations, noted the potential for intergenerational practice to build social capital for mentees and mentors (Cumming-Potvin & MacCallum, 2010). While core activities involved older mentors providing support to younger, less experienced mentees, high school students assisted older people to gain technical knowledge and skills through a series of six computer-based lessons. Cumming-Potvin and MacCallum's findings also suggested that the relationships formed between mentors and mentees have potential for mutual benefit and development. The mentoring sessions, for example, "promoted computer skills in older mentees while creating a sense of accomplishment and self-esteem for young mentors" (Cumming-Potvin & MacCallum, 2010, p. 315). Lave and Wenger (1991) identified this shift in identity between newcomers and old-timers within communities of practice as "a richly diverse field of essential actors, rather than a teacher/learner dyad" (p. 56).

Peripheral participation as professional development. An article examining professional development situated in meaningful practice as a means to retain educators (Morrell, 2003), cited teacher attrition and burnout as serious problems facing schools

(Darling-Hammond, 2000). According to Morrell, "Legitimate peripheral participation implies that teachers need spaces to be humble about their practice and ask naïve questions without feeling threatened or inadequate" (p. 98). Development, for veteran teachers, too, should include spaces for legitimate peripheral participation and should be intellectual and humanizing (Morrell, 2003). Morrell's article described peripheral participation of teacher fellows during a summer research seminar. He drew upon several qualitative data sources including teacher feedback and observation, and focused on four participation structures found to be most salient to professional development within the study: public teaching episodes, co-planning and debriefing sessions, multiple extended observations of professional practice, and a teacher research seminar (Morrell, 2003). The teachers who participated in these professional development structures self-reported through surveys and interviews that they benefited from witnessing and enacting successful practice, and their learning was maximized when it was a situated activity and teachers were allowed to work with each other to solve real problems related to their practice (Morrell, 2003). Morrell, however, did not include the survey tool or the supporting data analysis.

Reassessment of key concepts in workplace learning. Fuller, Hodkinson, Hodkinson and Unwin (2005) provided a critical perspective of Lave and Wenger's concept of "legitimate peripheral participation" as a means of understanding workplace learning. Lave and Wenger focused on the situated learning process by which new entrants to an activity or workplace gain the skills, knowledge and habits necessary to becoming "full participants." Fuller et al. (2005) noted that "while the study and explanation of apprenticeship learning was an important stimulus, their [Lave and

Wenger] theoretical aim to provide a comprehensive theory of learning as social practice was broader and more ambitious" (p. 51).

Fuller et al. (2005) stated that the broadness of this theory in Lave and Wenger's book lead to its opacity. For example, Lave and Wenger stated in *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*, "learning is not merely situated in practice—as if it were some independently verifiable process that just happened to be located somewhere; learning is an integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in world" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 35). Fuller et al. (2005) critiqued the ambiguity in this idea, and further provided a critical analysis of the dimensions of 'communities of practice' and 'legitimate peripheral participation.' Fuller et al. examined how evidence from studies were illustrative of the ways in which Lave and Wenger's approach has been helpful in explaining diverse case-study data, but also areas where it has fallen short.

Fuller et al. (2005) provided a rationale for why Lave and Wenger's book continued to provide an important source of theoretical insight while acknowledging its limitations of application to contemporary workplaces in advanced industrial societies. For example, Fuller et al. noted legitimate peripheral participation was helpful in understanding the processes of learning entailed in becoming full members. Lave and Wenger (1991) asserted the process of learning was, "a place in which one moves toward more-intensive participation" (p. 36). However, Fuller et al. pointed out that additional dimensions needed to be added to Lave and Wenger's original account, noting their research has demonstrated that experienced workers are also learning through their engagement with novices. Part of the process of legitimate peripheral participation for many novices is to help other workers to learn, and this learning is multi-directional.

According to Fuller et al. (2005), "this insight is of significance as it helps undermine the view of communities of practice as one-directional learning" (p. 48). It also challenged Wenger's (1998) view of legitimate peripheral participation by placing greater emphasis on change through cultural reproduction, and contests the notion that learning occurs from the outside periphery to the center (Fuller et al., 2005). Where things work well, bringing in newcomers is a valuable strategy in enhancing the on-going learning in a community of practice. Fuller et al. cited examples of apprentices passing on their new skills and knowledge to older workers as part of everyday workplace activity. Consequently, the 'novice' becomes the 'expert' for periods of time (Fuller et al., 2005).

Planting the seed of teacher identity. Harlow and Cobb addressed in their 2014 case study the importance of teacher identity and its impact on teacher retention, among other benefits (Harlow & Cobb, 2014). It is through interactions with others that identity is formed, influenced and reshaped through continuous interactions within a community of practice (Wenger, 1998). *Teacher identity* can be described as a self-attributed notion that is constructed through teaching experiences that affirm what it means to be a teacher (Harlow & Cobb, 2014). Harlow and Cobb examined the impact of a redeveloped program on pre-service teachers in their first year of teacher education. The program aimed to prepare pre-service teachers with a more realistic and authentic understanding of what it means to be a teacher, and thereby develop a strong sense of teacher identity. Pre-service teachers were paired with associate teachers in classrooms once a week while completing teacher preparation coursework at the same time. The program redesign came about as a result of advocacy for greater flexibility and responsiveness to the realities of teaching by providing authentic, integrated teacher education through collaborative

partnerships with local schools (Harlow & Cobb, 2014). This community of practice brought about "active participation and reflection on the roles and responsibilities of teaching alongside an understanding of the implicit codes of practice embedded in teaching" (Harlow & Cobb, 2014, p. 71) and supported the understanding of what it means to be a teacher (Wenger, 1998).

Using a mixed methods approach, data was collected and compiled in the form of two case studies to account for the experience and implementation of the program. Likert-scale survey items collected from 80 pre-service teachers enabled the researchers to identify emerging patterns and codify the data into themes. These themes were contrasted and compared with statistical information, and through the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data including interviews and focus groups, the researchers established a more practical understanding of the development of teacher identity within a reframed community of practice (Harlow & Cobb, 2014).

Harlow and Cobb's findings were discussed within the framework of Wenger's social learning theory including community, practice, meaning-making and identity (Wenger, 1998). The study results appeared to support earlier research suggesting that a collaborative structure allows for an authentic teaching experience, and teaching the course content situated within the school context in partnership with school and university staff is beneficial. While an early sense of teacher identity was evident, further research is needed to examine the development of teacher identity and the long-term benefits of an integrated experience (Harlow & Cobb, 2014).

Learning climate, leader support, and leader interaction. Involvement and engagement of members is critical to the effectiveness of a community of practice

(Baker-Eveleth, Chung, Eveleth, & O'Neill, 2011). Baker-Eveleth et al. (2011) reported the results of a study identifying three factors that impacted the development of a community of practice: learning climate, leader support, and leader interaction. According to Wenger, individuals reported high levels of meaning, involvement, identification, and belongingness to a community when they acted "as resources to each other exchanging information, making sense of situations, sharing new tricks and new ideas, as well as keeping each other company and spicing up each other's working days" (Wenger, 1998, p. 47).

Learning, then, can be described in this social context as active, participatory, and a collective process of constructing and sharing knowledge (Baker-Eveleth et al., 2011). The researchers hypothesized that leaders would play a critical role in the extent to which members of a community of practice identify with the community, develop a sense of meaning, exhibit a high degree of involvement in the community, and develop a strong feeling of belonging in the community.

To investigate the role of social learning on the development of a community of practice, Baker-Eveleth et al. (2011) surveyed 94 business students in two cohort groups following a yearlong integrated business curriculum. In addition to traditional classroom instruction, students received additional hours spent with faculty team members interacting with cohort groups, student-team mentoring meetings, presentation practice sessions, evening examinations, one-on-one advising and tutoring, and project debrief sessions. These social conditions provided a unique opportunity for the faculty to facilitate social learning practices and to observe the development of a community of practice (Baker-Eveleth et al., 2011).

In the Baker-Eveleth et al. (2011) study, the correlations between the three social-learning aspects of the program, learning climate, leader support and leader interaction, and the four characteristics of a community of practice, identification, belongingness, meaning and involvement, were positive and significant. Moreover, through hierarchical multiple regression analysis, a fixed order of entry for variables was used to control for the effects of covariates, or to test the effects of certain predictors independent of the influence of others. Known predictors should be entered first in their importance in predicting the outcome (Field, 2009). In this study, the relationships between belongingness and leader support and leader interaction were significant and positive (i.e., $\beta = 0.43$, $p \leq 0.01$, $\beta = 0.24$, $p \leq 0.05$, respectively), offering some support for the expectation that social-learning practices play a positive role in developing a community of practice (Baker-Eveleth et al., 2011). The relationships between identification and learning climate and leader support were also significant and positive (i.e., $\beta = 0.15$, $p \leq 0.10$, $\beta = 0.36$, $p \leq 0.01$, respectively), offering some support for the researchers' hypotheses. Likewise, the relationship between involvement and leader interaction was significant and positive (i.e., $\beta = 0.48$, $p \leq 0.01$), offering some support for the expectation that social-learning practices or behaviors play a positive role in developing a community of practice. Lastly, the relationship between meaning and leader interaction was significant and positive (i.e., $\beta = 0.47$, $p \leq 0.01$).

Baker-Eveleth et al. (2011) noted that while it is accepted that communities of practice facilitate knowledge sharing, less is known about the factors that promote the development of them. They found that leader support has a positive effect on identification and belongingness, climate has a positive effect on identification, and

leader interaction has a positive impact on belongingness, involvement and meaning. The authors concluded from the results of the study that supportiveness through climate and leader support plays a critical role in the formation of attachments with the community (i.e. identification and belongingness) and that interaction with the leader plays a central role to the extent that members take action as a result of their membership or see the value of taking action in the future (Baker-Eveleth et al., 2011).

These six studies provided a foundation for the research to follow within the theoretical constructs of situated learning and social capital theory. The author reviewed qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods research as well as theoretical articles to support the study and the research design. Through this examination, the researcher became grounded in the literature associated with the theoretical constructs of situated learning and social capital.

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

Chapter Overview

In Chapter Three, an overview is provided of the methodology used to address the three research questions regarding communities of practice and teacher social capital. Included in this chapter are the research design, setting, participant and sampling procedures, measures addressing validity and reliability, and the data collection and analysis processes. Also included are the limitations of the research design and study.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were designed to examine how communities of practice generate teacher social capital. More specifically, the researcher examined how teachers described their community of practice through the lens of legitimate peripheral participation, how teachers connected their trajectory to social capital, and the implications for school leaders to grow social capital through communities of practice. The research questions were as follows:

Research Question 1: How do teachers describe their community of practice?

Research Question 2: How do communities of practice generate teacher social capital?

Research Question 3: What are the implications for school leaders to grow teacher social capital through communities of practice?

Research Design

The researcher selected a qualitative case study as the research design to address the three research questions. Qualitative research can be described as an inquiry process

of understanding in a natural setting where "the researcher is an instrument of data collection and gathers words or pictures, analyzes them inductively, focuses on the meaning of participants, and described a process that is expressive and persuasive in language" (Creswell, 1998, p. 14). This meaning and process can be organized through qualitative research and takes place within a real-life, contemporary context or setting (Yin, 2009). Yin also suggested the design of the study should be representative or typical and describe common situations. Communities of practice are commonplace in organizations and describe how people interact with each other to establish and grow their relationships (Wenger, 1998). For this reason, a single case study design was selected, although there are numerous types of case study designs that can be used depending on the purpose and number of groups analyzed (Creswell, 2007). In this case, the purpose of the case study design using interviews was to explore how communities of practice generate teacher social. As in qualitative research, there were no dependent or independent variables.

Setting and Participants

The setting for this study was a small school serving students at the elementary, middle and high school levels. When compared to the student enrollment of other districts in the state, the district is one of the largest, and is among the top 20 most diverse school districts in the United States.

The participants in this study included teacher volunteers and met the minimum recommended sample size of 4 - 5 participants for case study research (Creswell, 2007). Participants were identified within this study by pseudonyms, and they represented a cross-section of 35 staff based on gender, age, position, and years of experience.

Sampling Process

Creswell (2007) stated that data collection involved a wide array of procedures as the researcher builds an in-depth picture of the case. Yin (2009) identified six sources of evidence collection: document analysis, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts. For this qualitative case study, the researcher utilized interviews as the form of data collection to enable members of the community of practice to individually and collectively respond to direct questions. Other evidence sources fell outside the scope of this study. This study focused on teacher descriptions of their community of practice and the development of social capital. However, further studies could include additional qualitative evidence collected over time to examine the temporal nature of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998).

Measures

A data collection measure was selected for this study was the interview analysis. Two types of interview structures were selected: the semi-structured, one-on-one with each participant, followed by a focus-group interview. Interviews are an important source of information and gather data about past events that cannot be replicated (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, semi-structured interviews were used to investigate communities of practices through the lens of situated learning theory and to explore how communities of practice generated teacher social capital. Research participants were interviewed at least one time for approximately 20 minutes. Semi-structured questions were designed to gather facts as well as opinions from key respondents (Yin, 2009). Based on the literature review and findings from other studies within the topic of communities of practice, the

researcher developed interview questions and audio-recorded the responses using an open source application (Tapmedia, 2017) to conduct an effective interview (Merriam, 2009).

Validity and Reliability

In qualitative research, validity and reliability are concerns that can be approached through careful attention to a study's conceptualization and the way in which the data are collected, analyzed, and interpreted, and by the way in which the findings are presented (Merriam, 2009). Both are important considerations in any research study. Maxwell (2005) argued the researcher cannot truly capture reality, and therefore, validity is a goal rather than a product. Validity cannot be proven or taken for granted, since "it is relative, and must be assessed in relationship to the purposes and circumstances of the research rather than being a context-independent property of methods or conclusions" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 105). Creswell (2007) defined validity as an attempt to address the accuracy of the findings.

Pilot testing was used to address validity within this study. Prior to interviewing participants, a pilot test was used to refine the interview questions. Test case respondents were given the interview questions and were selected based on convenience, access, and geographic proximity (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2009). The anecdotal feedback from the pilot test respondents provided the researcher the opportunity to revise the questions to enhance clarity.

Merriam (2009) also identified several strategies that would increase the validity of findings including triangulation, member checks, adequate engagement in data collection, and reflexivity. The first validity strategy of triangulation consists of multiple sources of evidence to confirm emergent findings (Merriam, 2009). For this reason, the

researcher collected interview data in a one-on-one setting as well as a focus-group

setting and triangulated these data with current literature as an information resource.

Maxwell (2005) wrote, "triangulation is collecting information from a diverse range of

individuals and settings, using a variety of methods" (p. 112). The second strategy to

increase validity is member checks. By taking the preliminary data analysis back to the

participants, member checking enables the researcher to solicit feedback on the emergent

findings (Merriam, 2009). Adequate engagement is a third strategy to strengthen validity

and involves spending adequate time collecting data until the data is saturated. In this

case, the researcher provided adequate engagement by collecting data until there was

repetition of data and data that supported the various perspectives of participants. The

fourth strategy, reflexivity, ensures validity through the recognition of how the researcher

influences the conduct and conclusions of the study based on personal values and

expectations (Merriam, 2009). To provide clarification on interpretation of the data, the

researcher explained biases, dispositions, and assumptions regarding the research in a

following section.

Reliability within a study is defined as the consistency and repeatability of the

research (Yin, 2009), and the extent to which the research findings can be replicated

(Merriam, 2009). However, Merriam stated that the complexity of human interpretation

could make replication problematic in qualitative research. To mitigate this problem, the

researcher provided equitable conditions and information regarding the study including a

purpose statement, the interview questions, interview protocol, and the scheduled date,

time and location for the interview. Additionally, a uniform structure for the interview

was provided by asking the questions in the same order and within the same timeframe for each participant.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher is critical within a study. In qualitative research, this role is situationally determined by the impact of the writing on the researcher, the participants, and on the reader. The reflexivity of the researcher is a key rhetorical issue in a qualitative study, according to Creswell (2007).

How we write is a reflection of our own interpretation based on the cultural, social, gender, class, and personal politics that we bring to research. All writing is positioned within a stance. All researchers shape the writing that emerges, and qualitative researchers need to accept this interpretation and be open about it in their writings. (Creswell, 2007, p. 179)

The integrity of the researcher is also key to this role, and Merriam (2009) stated that researchers needed to explain their biases, dispositions, and assumptions regarding the research study. Such clarification allows the reader to understand how a researcher might have arrived at a particular interpretation of the data. Maxwell (2005) also addressed this idea by explaining the reason for making perspective, biases, and assumptions clear to the reader "is not to eliminate variance between researchers in values and expectations they bring to a study, but establish an understanding of how a particular researcher's values and expectations influence the conduct and conclusion of a study" (p. 108).

This researcher was employed by the local school district and was the principal and only administrator at the school in which this study was conducted. Moreover, the

researcher was the supervisor of all staff within the school and had held this position for six years at the time of the study. The personal biases and perspectives associated with this role were recognized by the researcher. To ensure that assumptions and biases were mitigated in the analysis and outcomes, the selection of case study methodology was appropriately transparent, and strategies to ensure validity and reliability were closely adhered to throughout the study. The following paragraphs within this section attempt to explain the stance of the researcher within this qualitative study.

The researcher's interest in situated learning theory and teacher social capital emerged during her first year serving in the school within this study. As a key initiative, the district had just implemented Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) requiring regularly scheduled meeting dates and times, standardized agenda formats, and meeting minutes recorded on a contractually negotiated template that was submitted to supervisors for review.

As a principal new to this school, the researcher described the staff as gracious as she followed district imperatives to implement PLCs. What she learned through the patience of teachers, was the existence of a strong community of practice already in place. The researcher determined through a review of the literature, that a PLC was not a community of practice. This community was organic, self-supporting, and didn't need to follow a handbook to support the professional growth and development of teachers.

At that same time, the researcher noted a decline in the number of qualified applicants for teaching positions in her district, especially in math, science and special education. This shrinking candidate pool was felt at the local, state and national level. As a result, teacher development pipelines were springing up around Washington state and in

other parts of the country to address the perceived teacher shortage. The researcher also determined that teacher attrition rates were low at her school, student achievement was high, climate survey data was favorable, and teachers anecdotally reported a love for teaching, care for their students, and rapport with their teacher community.

It occurred to the researcher that teachers in her school were investing in their professional relationships with each other and creating value in their social network. In an act defining her perspective, bias and assumptions, she shelved her district how-to-run PLC texts and began researching the intersection of situated learning theory and social capital.

Data Collection

Following the pilot testing of interview questions, all staff were invited to be participants, and participation was completely voluntary. Recognizing the positional power as principal and supervisor, the researcher briefly explained the nature of the optional study at the end of a staff meeting, and invited staff to contact her within the following week if they were interested in participating. Five staff contacted the researcher with an interest in participating. All staff who voiced an interest in participating were included. The researcher then scheduled appointments for the interviews outside of workday hours. Using an interview protocol, prior to the scheduled time, the participants were provided instructions including the purpose for the interview, specific terminology to be used, the Institutional Review Board Informed Consent document (see Appendix A) as well as the interview questions. The researcher reviewed the informed consent document with participants and clarified they could discontinue their participation at any time. All participants read and signed the informed consent form. The interview began

only after the participant was ready to proceed. The interview itself is defined as a data

collection method in which an interviewer asks an interviewee questions (Vogt &

Johnson, 2016), and the questions are used as a guide when interviewing respondents.

The researcher asked the same questions of each participant and in the same order

and posed follow-up questions as necessary to provide clarity and development of ideas.

Each interview was also recorded with the permission of the participants. Following the

completion of individual interviews, the researcher provided transcripts to the

participants for their review and feedback.

Following a similar protocol, the researcher invited the same participants to a

thirty-minute follow-up group interview to tease out supporting or new information and

ensure all participants were able to address the questions and respond to each other's

comments. This interview was also recorded and transcribed, and subsequently provided

to the participants for review and feedback. The researcher completed a coding and

theming process to determine trends and patterns among the participants.

Data Analysis

Creswell (2007) described the process of data analysis in qualitative research as

preparing and organizing the data, then reducing the data into themes through a process

of coding, and finally representing the data. This process necessitates the use of a strategy

to treat evidence fairly, produce compelling conclusions, and rule out alternative

interpretations (Yin, 2009). The researcher used Creswell's (2007) data analysis spiral

process to organize and interpret the data. The steps are as follows:

1. Organize and prepare the data.

2. Read through all the data.

3. Describe, classify, and interpret the data using codes.

4. Use a coding process to develop themes.

5. Interpret the data.

6. Present the data.

To organize the data, the researcher used the Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) Miner Lite (Qualitative Data Analysis Miner Lite, 2016) computer software program to create an inventory for transcripts and read through the data in its entirety. The researcher then processed each transcript and its corresponding notes and coded the responses. Coding is the act of reducing the data into meaningful segments and assigning names for the segments (Creswell, 2007). After coding each of the responses, the researcher developed themes based on Wenger's social learning theory (2009) and the emerging commonalities. These themes formed common ideas connecting several, aggregated codes (Creswell, 2007). For the purpose of addressing issues of reliability, the transcripts were independently reviewed by another qualitative researcher to establish interrater reliability and in turn, provided the stability of responses (Creswell, 2007). Vogt & Johnson (2016) said interrater reliability required agreement and consistency among raters and was the extent to which multiple raters would judge responses in the same way. Interpretation involves making sense of the data. Creswell (2007) asserted that in the process of interpretation, researchers would step back and form larger meanings of what is happening in a given situation. This process involves moving from a concrete description of observable data to a more abstract level using concepts to describe phenomena (Merriam, 2009). Finally, the researcher presented the data in this dissertation study.

Limitations

   A case study poses limitations. A single analysis does not necessarily result in generalizability, although measures were taken to increase the reliability of the study such as utilizing an independent coder while interpreting data to increase interrater reliability. Likewise, critical and reflexive analyses were utilized throughout the study, but as an embedded researcher, her stance, including assumptions and bias, cannot be completely dispelled. The researcher's position as supervisor was also a limitation. To address these issues of validity, participation was optional and open to all staff, and participants had the opportunity to review and approve their responses. Lastly, the small number of participants, indicative of a case study, could be considered a limitation.

Chapter Four

Results

This study is an examination of how communities of practice generate teacher social capital. More specifically, the researcher explores how teachers describe their community of practice through the lens of legitimate peripheral participation, how teachers connect their trajectory to social capital, and the implications for school leaders to grow social capital through communities of practice. Each participant was interviewed twice in the month of February, first, in an individual interview and again in a focus group interview. As summarized in Table 1, all participants were from the same school, but their experience level spanned from third grade to twelfth grade as well as content-specific areas including elementary, counseling, English language arts and physics. Participants also ranged in their number of overall years of teaching experience from six to twenty-two years, and their employment at the school spanned one to fifteen years. Three participants were male and two participants were female. While participation was voluntary, the participants happened to provide a cross-section of teacher representation, including gender, an age span from 34 – 65 years, grade level, years of experience, and years at this particular school that included and described multiple perspectives about this case (Creswell, 2007).

Table 1

Participants' Characteristics

	Nichelle	Preston	Deborah	Neale	Tony
Gender	Female	Male	Female	Male	Male
Age	65	34	59	36	60
Years of Experience	19	6	22	8	7
Years at this school	7	1	15	3	4
Level	Secondary	Elementary	Elementary and Secondary	Elementary	Secondary

The responses of the participants described their community of practice, perspectives on their experience and relationships with others in the community, and their development and use of knowledge (Blackmore, 2010). Four themes aligned with Wenger's social learning model (Wenger, 1998) and emerged from these interviews. These include a) belonging, b) practice, c) meaning, and d) identity. These themes are summarized in Table 2 below. Additionally, through the focus group interview, the researcher teased out further participant insight on social capital and its implications for school leadership.

Table 2

Summary of Themes and Sub-Themes with Representative Quotes

Theme	Example
Belonging	
Community	"There's a real sense of community among teachers and staff, and . . . I haven't been at a school that has had the most cohesion. I just feel welcome from the front office and the teachers and . . . the secondary level" (Preston, ll. 19-21).
Family	"We're a small school. We tend to have a little bit of a family feeling. I think that we recognize in a small school that you have to bring more to the table than just your expertise as a teacher" (Tony, ll. 172-174).
Practice	
Engagement	"Every once in a while, we get frustrated, but really, we're trying to help each other work things out. So, we value each other, and again that's because we are a small enough group to get to know each other" (Nichelle, ll. 210-212).
Trust	"We truly have to trust each other. I think there is that trust in the school where if I do my job and prepare students for you, I can trust you're going to do your job and help them succeed beyond that" (Neale, ll. 16-18).
Structure	"You've built it into our schedule. I have an hour where my job is to hook up with other teachers and students. So, I've been able to collaborate" (Nichelle, ll. 76-77).
Informal	"We do so much informal work at our lunches and that when we do formal work, it's not as awkward" (Tony, ll. 112-113).

Table 2 (continued).

Meaning

    Purpose   "[Our purpose] is shaped by [being] student-centered. They are our priorities, and barriers only mean problem-solving" (Deborah, ll. 79-80).

    Why We Exist   "We tend to be people who care about people. We want the world to be a better place, and I guess we can't change everyone's life so let's start with this—as many kids as we can get in our rooms. It's a lot harder to change an adult life then set a kid up to find the right place for themselves" (Neale, ll. 64-67).

    Leadership   "That message from the top that this is something you value, and if you value it, you've made place for it. You know, it's easy to give lip service, oh, we want to collaborate, we want to, you know, we want this community. We have these values, but if it's not, if there's not a place made for that, then it's really hard, and after a while it doesn't feel genuine" (Nichelle, ll. 79-83).

Identity

    Uniqueness   "People find it motivating to do things our way. Because we have a unique staff and a unique student population, and its motivating to stick together and continue to do what we know works with our staff and our students" (Deborah, ll. 161-163).

    Role   "The type of people that we are, and that has a lot to do with the type of school we are. We know going in, what's expected of us" (Tony, ll. 16-17).

    Newcomers   "Asking questions about me and on taking an interest in me. Where do I come from, and just feeling like teachers are interested in me, and maybe I have something to offer. I am just valued. . . I've always felt at our school that my opinions matter, and I am an equal member of collaboration" (Preston, ll. 28-32).

    Small School   "In our school, we're so small, we can't have failure . . . So, we work super hard on making sure students are successful" (Deborah, ll. 92-94)

Belonging

All five participants described a sense of belonging at the school. They included descriptions of attachment and acceptance with their community, and three participants used familial descriptors for their relationships and personal connections with their colleagues. The theme of belonging, then, was described through the sub-themes of *community* and *family*.

Community. Every participant described the sense of community with their colleagues and students, and several compared the community with their past community experiences. Deborah described community as follows:

The sense of community at our school is extremely strong. I've worked at five different buildings in this school district, and our school is by far the strongest community, and when you asked me that question, I'm thinking about—where is that coming from? What is it made of? I think one of the things is we are so small, we don't have a person to handle every issue or situation that comes up so because of that we have to cross purposes . . . and that involves interacting with a lot of different people, so I think that helps people to feel connected and important to each other. (Deborah, ll. 10-16)

Nichelle stated her level of attachment to this school exceeded her experience in other buildings:

I feel very attached to the school, and I've never felt as attached to a school and a staff. I mean, where else [would] I dress up like the yellow brick road, or an Elvis record, or Ghostbusters? I never participated in those kinds of activities, school

spirit things in my other schools, so just that is for me is telling, you know, that I feel safe enough. I feel welcomed. (Nichelle, ll. 13-16)

Preston compared his previous experience to the grade span of the school including three levels—elementary, middle and high school, all on one campus. "It's a stronger sense of community than when they're on separate campuses because I'm able to see . . . there's a shared commitment to the same students" (Preston, ll. 60-62). "I haven't been at a school that has had the most cohesion . . . The sense of community is very high as far as feeling like members needs are met. I've never had a need that I felt like I couldn't ask someone and have it be[en] dealt with" (Preston, ll. 19-20, 21-23).

Participants noted that community extended beyond teachers and was shared with students and their families as well. Deborah described building relationships with students as a strength of the staff:

The staff has as a whole is relational with students and families. We have the benefit of we're so small, that year after year after year, elementary and secondary, we tend to have the same kids and families, so maybe it's easier to build relations. But I think maybe it's something our staff, because of the setting they're in, is something they're very strong at. They assume that they can build that relationship. We tease and say that if you just love on them enough, they'll come around. (Deborah, ll. 131-136)

Tony described the impact of the community culture benefiting staff and students: "The culture works on the teachers with collegiality. I see that work with the kids, too. Plus, they're more collegial with me" (Tony, ll. 242-243). Neal described that expectations for students are also shared by staff and benefitted the school culture:

We have that pride in school PRIDE [persevering, respectful, inclusive,

dependable, and engaged], and having really clear, solid, foundational words

where students know what we expect and that we're all striving to be better people

in these five ways, it helps with the culture. (Neale, ll. 61-63)

Family. Some of the participants used the analogy of family to describe their

relationships with colleagues. Tony explained that the small school environment created

the feeling of family. "Because were a small school, we tend to have a little bit of a

family feeling. I think that we recognize in a small school that you have to bring more to

the table than just your expertise as a teacher" (Tony, ll. 172-174). Nichelle described

how staff supported each other in their professional and personal lives:

We have a really strong sense of community, and we know what each other is

going through in family life as well as school life, and we're pretty supportive of

each other and try to, you know, take up the slack when somebody's having a hard

time, and that's I think that is a genuine thing that's come from this place.

(Nichelle, ll. 26-29)

Neale described the importance of supporting others in their personal of lives to

benefit teachers and their students:

We're very good at supporting each other outside, like our personal lives as well,

which seems unimportant. I had a hard time in my life getting over myself to that

point . . . you have to be bigger than yourself and care about people, because you

can't teach if your life is falling apart. We think about with students, but not

always think about it with peers. (Neale, ll. 173-177)

Like a family, Tony described the importance of protecting the relationships, even if there was conflict:

> We like this so much that we're not willing to damage it . . . when you care enough about each other, you know, it's kind of like family around the dinner table, you just know, we'll do this later. We're not going to solve the world, but we are going to solve this sandwich right here with everyone else. (Tony, ll. 95 – 100)

Practice

The participants all addressed the theme of practice in their interviews. Emerging sub-themes included *engagement* through working together, *trust* teachers have in each other and their willingness to be vulnerable, the physical and organizational *structures* of the school, and *informal opportunities* that benefit their participation within the community.

Engagement. Three of the five participants described their engagement by comparing their community of practice to their participation in the mandated, school district professional learning community (PLC). Participants attributed the size of the school, in part, for existing differences. Deborah described a staff-designed PLC at the school, referred to as the flag team:

> PLCs are good, but . . . people treat those as top down. I don't think there is quite the gusto in those. But I will say, of the PLCs, I think the flag team is awesome and . . . we have a very diverse group [participating in it] . . . It allows us to get a peek from the top and collaborate with the other people . . . because in our school,

we're so small, we can't have failure . . . so, we work super hard on making sure

students are successful. (Deborah, ll. 87-94)

Nichelle contrasted her PLC experience at other schools with this school:

[Complaining] was the norm when I worked at both middle school and high

school when we had our PLCs. Most of the time was spent complaining about

students, complaining about what we had to do, and that just isn't true here. And

every once in a while, we get frustrated, but really, we're trying to help each other

work things out. So, we value each other, and again, that's because we are [a]

small enough group to get to know each other. (Nichelle, ll. 208-212)

Nichelle continued to describe the organic nature of PLCs at the school compared

to the resistance to PLCs that she had previously experienced:

The teachers at both the middle school and high school resisted PLCs all the way

through . . . we have to get together, but we're doing it under duress, and we're

going to do as little as possible. Where [here] we kind of have natural PLCs. They

happen naturally . . . we have PLCs every day . . . that's kind of cool making

connections. So, they happen, but it's a real organic thing. It's not, you have to do

this. It's not manufactured. (Nichelle, ll. 165-174)

Neale also described PLC and teacher collaboration:

There are the PLCs and the times where we collaboratively get together as a staff

and will work on just general teaching skills and ways to look at kids, and help

kids, support them. I think one of the biggest difference makers is when we do

work together, physically together, and when it comes to . . . students being

tracked by multiple teachers [the flag team] rather than just having one teacher to be connected to. (Neale, ll. 75-79)

While Preston did not use the phrase PLC in his interview, he described teacher collaboration that was indicative of a PLC meeting or other team meeting:

The elementary team has been able to collaborate across grade levels, and that's been beneficial because we've able to hear about fourth grade and what's going on in fourth grade, and I've been able to share what we're doing in third grade, and I think it's helpful to know where the students are going to next and to frame our instruction with that mindset, too. (Preston, ll. 46-49)

Trust. Four of five participants addressed trust as necessary for engagement within the community. The participant who did not address trust in his interview was in his first year at this school. The trust necessary for each teacher to effectively prepare students for the next grade level was described by Neale. "We truly have to trust each other. I think there is that trust in the school where if I do my job and prepare students for you, I can trust you're going to do your job and help them succeed beyond that" (Neale, ll. 17-18). Tony connected the environment with the ability to be honest with colleagues as well as students:

We want it to be the best possible environment. It also it gives us a chance to . . . be more open and honest about who we are. I feel much more comfortable sharing me with the students than I would at the big comprehensive. I felt like the least they knew about me, the better. (Tony, ll. 247-250)

Nichelle described trust as a key component for engagement as well as feeling valued by school leadership and her colleagues:

I think it's all about trust . . . part of its size, part of it's the way you approach us

. . . you seem to genuinely care. I think most people sense your genuine care . . .

that makes you do…it's just like with students, if they don't think you care about

them, they're going to do what they want to do . . . you're a good listener, and so

it's a slow process of building trust. It's all about trust and confidence. You know,

people want to please other people if they sense that they're valued. And if they

don't sense they're valued, it's like, I'll do this for me, or why should I work so

hard? I've been in both places . . . It goes back to trust that we trust each other,

and we know each other well. (Nichelle, ll. 111-118; 181)

Nichelle described the feelings associated with engagement with colleagues,

including vulnerability and uncomfortableness:

I think we also have people who are maybe not as afraid to collaborate. You

know, old-school teachers: You closed your classroom door and it was your

kingdom. You know, it was terrifying if anybody walked in. And I think that [is]

still the norm with most big schools . . . We have to be a little more vulnerable

here, and we have to be willing to be a little uncomfortable sometimes. (Nichelle,

ll. 86-92)

Deborah described the connection with each other as generating trust:

Sometimes, people don't get us, and that we're so connected within each other

they are more trusting of ideas or seeking help from people within the building

than outside, and that's an example of the belonging and feeling connected to each

other. (Deborah, ll. 20-22)

Structure. Three participants commented that their engagement with their community is impacted by physical or organizational structures including master scheduling and use of time. Tony described the building layout and its limitations. He said of the teacher in the adjoining classroom:

 We work really well together. Part of that is because naturally we are right next to each other so it's easy for us to communicate, which I think is important. Comparing that to classrooms, where we have to get out, go to the hallway, walk down the hallway and go in. There's just a natural barrier there. But even those classrooms, where I do have to leave and go, I always feel welcome, I never feel like I'm intruding. We show respect for each other's classrooms. (Tony, ll. 53-58)

Deborah described the structured time within the school day, engagement through co-teaching opportunities, and how the master schedule supported both:

The building teachers are excited to work together and help each other, fill each other's needs through co-teaching. Some people have time built-in, but other people, like Joe, are just doing it, type of a thing. And they have to take the time to plan for that, and I think that's just really cool. (Deborah, ll. 29-32)

...

Providing time and removing obstacles. . . our building principal does a very good job of building in time for people to be able to cross teach [and] . . . it's one of the reasons that that happens . . . And having to go out of the way, like even giving a couple of hours for intervention so that the intervention people can go in and help to meet a need. (Deborah, ll. 33-37, 41-42).

Nichelle also described the importance of master scheduling to support engagement through collaboration and community:

> You've built it into our schedule. I have an hour where my job is to hook up with other teachers and students. So, I've been able to collaborate . . . so just so having that opportunity built-in . . . it's kind of that message from the top that this is something you value, and if you value it, you've made place for it. You know, it's easy to give lip service, oh, we want to collaborate . . . we want this community. We have these values, but if it's not, if there's not a place made for that, then it's really hard, and after a while it doesn't feel genuine. (Nichelle, ll. 76-83)

Nichelle further described meeting structures that were in place that contributed to engaging as a community. She described Den Time, a 10-minute, schoolwide daily community-building meeting with students. She also referenced staff meetings and the flexibility of the agenda:

> It's again that structure . . . Den Time . . . where PRIDE and digital citizenship and . . . mindfulness and you know the intentional community-building . . . teachers actually practice all these things . . . and you give us time in our meetings to talk about that, and if something comes up, you know, we have a couple of truth tellers in our faculty, and you know ,and you're open to that, even if it's not something you always like to hear, you make room for that. (Nichelle, ll. 95-106)

Informal opportunities. Four of the five participants also referenced the unstructured times they engaged with colleagues, specifically noting the importance of lunchtime. Tony described the informality at lunchtime that resulted in increased collegiality during structured meetings:

There's both formal and informal, and the informal happens all the time. We talk,

we share notes, we lunch together, which is nice. I probably lunch together with

everyone else the least . . . sometimes I have kids in my classroom doing testing,

or if it's a cold day, I just let them in there and eat. But even so, I still feel like I

have a lot of time informally. I kind of make it a habit to check in with all the

other teachers at least once a week to stick my head in the classroom see what

they're doing, what's new, what's happening, and then also, the lunches go on a

big way. And we do so much informal work at our lunches that when we do

formal work, it's not as awkward. . . it's more collegial. (Tony, ll. 104 – 113)

Deborah stated that engagement with colleagues also occurred informally:

I've actually seen it in the lunchroom. We'll all be sitting down for lunch and

someone brings something up. Even if it starts as a grumble, then someone else

says, well, I did this and it worked really well, and ahh, I'll try that, too. So, the

lunchroom is a spot . . . and Friday get-togethers, and even though I don't attend

them myself, they talk about students at that time as well. (Deborah, ll. 104-108)

Preston described that even as a new staff member this year, he felt a part of the

community in both formal and informal settings: "From the perspective of a new teacher,

I'm included in collaboration and discussions, but also just feeling like in the staff room

at lunches, not feeling excluded, but feeling like part of the group" (Preston, ll. 16-18).

Prior to transferring to this school, Nichelle described she ate in isolation at her

first school. "I never, ever ate in the lunchroom. I sat in my classroom, and I didn't even

know where it was until like June" (Nichelle, ll. 124-126). Tony described collaboration

through the informal opportunities and family sub-themes. "Like family around the

dinner table, you just know . . . we're not going to solve the world, but you know, we are

going to solve this sandwich right here with everyone else" (Tony, ll. 98-100).

Meaning

The participants described meaning through four sub-themes: *purpose*, defined as

shared beliefs and vision that create a common understanding; *why we exist*, the reason

for the school to function; and *leadership*, how administrative decisions impact the

school's purpose and function.

Purpose. Neale spoke to the purpose of the school and the focus on learning

within the community. He described a shared goal among teachers who saw learning not

as something to get, but as preparation for life:

I think the culture is initially shaped by having a common goal, and I see in this

school . . . we're all here to support students as humans, preparing them for life

rather than just learning random things and passing tests and moving to the next

level. [There] seems to be a true buy-in to what's best for students. There's a lot of

flexibility with what students want to learn and how we know we meet their

needs. As far as learning, as an action, [it's] not a concrete thing they get, they

walk away with. (Neale, ll. 36-43)

While Neale described the school purpose in action terms, Tony used more

concrete descriptors to identify meaning through purpose:

A shared vision is probably really important . . . and I don't know if it would be

easy to articulate . . . you as the principal, you kind of have your vision of what

you want the school to be . . . we pick up on that either through each other, or

directly from you. And then there's all the little signs, the signage, the actual

signage, the way it's written, the way its presented, [it] communicates an

expectation or a feeling. I also think it comes back to us from our kids. (Tony, ll.

224-229)

Deborah described a philosophy and mindset indicative of the community purpose

that did not focus on test scores as a definition of success:

That positive, like everybody-can-grow philosophy, instead of being concerned

about getting dinged. With a school as small as us, it doesn't take more than a

couple [of] students scoring low to skew everything, and you have to understand

that the small-school dynamic is so different and for staff not to be scared, just to

look at it as one more thing we've got to plan around . . . It is shaped by [being]

student-centered, they are our priorities, and barriers only mean problem-solving.

If everyone goes forward with that attitude, we'll be fine. (Deborah, ll. 74-80)

Why we exist. Participants described the needs of the population they serve as the

reason for the school's existence. As a choice school, students do not attend the school

based on boundary, but by application. Deborah described the diversity at the school and

her own motivation to work with students who have not experienced success elsewhere:

We have such a mixed bag of students, and they all come in at a different place,

and we have a lot of students who have had issues at other places . . . but to watch

them come in and join in on our culture, that is very cool. I think the small

learning environment, because its small, doesn't mean it's any easier . . .the kids

in the classroom have extra challenges. So, I think that small environment keeps a

lot of our staff wanting to be there and motivated. For me, personally, being able

to reach students that have not been successful in other schools, that is really big

for me. In a strange sense, it's easy to work with the kids that everything goes well, but when you look at turning kids around who haven't done well in any place they've been, that is extremely motivating. (Deborah, ll. 150-162)

Neale described the teachers as people who care about people and function together to proactively impact the lives of students to benefit them as adults:

We tend to be people who care about people. We want the world to be a better place, and I guess we can't change everyone's life so let's start with this--as many kids as we can get in our rooms, and it's a lot harder to change an adult life then set a kid up to find the right place for themselves. (Neale, ll. 158-167)

Preston described the enjoyment and creativity of the teacher community as a function of student success:

There is a steely-eyed focus . . . on student success and everything else is kind of framed around that and student engagement, and students enjoy being at school. I've seen a lot of creative things teachers are doing and I think that's from their motivation, they want to get the kids to succeed. (Preston, ll. 83-86)

Leadership. Participants described they found meaning in their work when leadership was supportive, fostered relationships and provided positive feedback. Participants included the researcher, who was also their supervisor, in their descriptions as well as past leaders from other schools. Thee participants described leadership actions and perceived authenticity resulting in increased motivation among staff. Tony stated, "You as the principal, you kind of have your vision of what you want to school to be, and I think we pick up on that either through each other or directly from you" (Tony, ll. 225-226). Nichelle described the importance of relationships as a motivating factor:

My very first compliment as a teacher came from you. And this is after being a

teacher for 20 some years . . . Leadership is, well it's kind of like with kids. If

you're seen, and if you're acknowledged, then you want to work harder, you want

to figure out how to be a good teacher . . . We're seen, we're valued and it's the

relationships, you know, you foster relationships with staff, relationships between

each other, and that you know that makes all the difference. If there's no

relationship, then there's no reason to really commit and to give your best self.

(Nichelle, ll. 39-42, 217-220)

Nichelle continued to describe a previous school administrator and her negative

experience:

That was very sad. She never asked us what worked well at our school, you know,

so that was it. It was her, that's her style, you know. She has an agenda, and I

wouldn't be still teaching if I had to stay there. (Nichelle, ll. 153-155)

Both Nichelle and Deborah described the importance of positive and supportive

administrative decisions. "You as an administrator are a good listener and supportive . . .

The messages from the top make a huge difference, you know, those are important

things" (Nichelle, ll. 252-253).

You as a principal do a really good job of helping everybody on their staff to use

their strengths . . . of making sure that different people have different chances to

do things instead of always one person. You know, the usual leadership people.

Also, when you're looking at how our staffing meetings go. . . or those ways we

use those Wednesday trainings. If we have something that's not quite right, like if

a certain number of test scores are down, you don't come down on the people, you

look at it as like what the barriers, what we need to do, like problem solving

instead of punitive. And I think that help people to keep . . . going towards that

positive. (Deborah, ll. 61; 73-75)

Nichelle also described the perceived genuineness of the leader as giving meaning

to the purpose of the community:

It's the way you approach us, you know? I mean, when you seem to genuinely

care. I think most people sense your genuine care . . . it's just like with students, if

they don't think you care about them, they're going to do what they want to do . . .

you're a good listener and so it's a slow process of building trust. It's all about

trust and confidence. (Nichelle, ll. 111-116)

Nichelle continues by discussing the style of leadership:

It's the style of the administrator. Whether or not they really want to get to know

the teachers, or they see leading as, 'I tell you what to do' . . . the qualities of the

leader really kind of set the tone. (Nichelle, ll. 163-164; 204)

Identity

Participants described their identity, as participants within the community and as a

collective, through four emerging sub-themes. Participants all described the *uniqueness*

of the school as an identifying factor for the community. Participants also all discussed

the *role* of the individual within the community, the impact of roles on the school, and the

increased accountability to perform roles within the community. The third sub-theme

included new staff, who could be identified as *newcomers* to the community of practice

(Lave & Wenger, 1991), and lastly, the *small school* identity was described by all

participants, and two described it as central to the identity of the school.

Uniqueness. Participants described the uniqueness of the school as valued and motivating, for students and staff. Nichelle recalled a meeting from the early stages of planning for the school, over 21 years ago including the targeted population to be served:

From the beginning . . . I remember going to a meeting when it first started and they were just talking about what they wanted it to be, and that this was a different kind of school. We supported families, and we supported kids who were coming from homeschool situations, or kids who didn't fit in other schools. So, I've always been a weirdo, so you know. (Nichelle, ll. 63-66)

While Nichelle said she was not a teacher at the time, it was the purpose of this school and its intent that motivated her to become a teacher:

It was this school that made me decide to want to go back to school and get my credential, so and then it took me twelve years teaching other places before I got finally here. But that was always my goal, to teach here . . . from the time I volunteered it was clear that the teachers were connecting with each other. And it's just hard to find that in big schools. (Nichelle, ll. 49-59)

Deborah also described the uniqueness of the school as a motivator for staff:

People find it motivating to do things our way. Because we have a unique staff and a unique student population, its motivating to stick together and continue to do what we know works with our staff and our students. (Deborah, ll. 161-163)

Both Preston and Neale spoke to the positive aspects for students and staff of having elementary and secondary students on one campus. They described it as a distinctive feature of the school that students on single level campuses did not enjoy:

It is very unique because it's not like we forget about them once they leave our

classroom, especially at a school like our school, it's so small we see students year

after year. I can see how having been able to see them into secondary, I think

there's a bigger history with the students to draw from, which secondary can talk

with elementary about what worked and what successes they had with those

particular students and elementary [teachers] can keep in contact with students

they have had. I think that both of those are very valuable to being on the same

campus. (Preston, ll. 64-69)

Having a place where younger kids can see where they're going, visually and

physically see where they're going. Because for most, there is the end of one

school building, and they have no idea. [There is a] comfort level for a kid when

there is not an unknown, when they've seen the teachers. They've seen the rooms,

they've seen the other kids that successfully walked across the same path as them.

I think it's so comforting for kids. (Neale, ll. 132-138)

Role. Descriptions provided by every participant included reliance on the skillset

of others, being solely accountable to a role, while assuming many roles in the absence of

a larger staff. Deborah described the distribution of expertise as a source of validation

and a safeguard against fatigue for the staff:

Everybody has a chance to use their expertise. And that helps some people not to

burn out. An example I would use is Ahren heading up the [project]. Brilliant!

Because it makes her feel so important and validated, and a couple of other people

. . . were like, why didn't I get to do it? But giving people who have a different

skill, with her . . . background—she's a perfect fit! And we wouldn't think about

that unless you look closer. And I think you do a really good job of making sure

that different people have different chances to do things instead of always one

person. You know, the usual leadership people. (Deborah, ll. 61-70)

Deborah also described the connectedness in roles and the necessity of assuming

responsibility in the absence of a larger, comprehensive staff:

We don't have a person to handle every issue or situation that comes up, so

because of that, we have to cross purposes and take on roles that we typically

wouldn't take, and that involves interacting with a lot of different people. That

helps people to feel connected and important to each other. Because, it's not like

you can just look the other way and expect someone else to handle it. You kind of

have to jump in there. (Deborah, ll. 13-17)

Tony described the multiple, necessary roles in the context of a supportive

community: "You have to wear so many hats, you have to get along. And what's great is

it you don't have that feeling of, I have to get along, you want to get along" (Tony, ll.

188-190).

We have to do so many different things and we have to do them with each other,

and we have to learn from each other. Not just take over a job, . . . we not only

have to learn the technical end of the job, but the social end of the job, too. (Tony,

ll. 205-207).

Nichelle addressed the way teachers supported each other by acknowledging their

own strengths and limitations:

I think there's a lack of judgment, you know, I mean it would be really easy to let

things happen all the time, and we do things well, and we do things not so well,

and I think we're just kind to each other, and so we bring out the best in each

other. And we try to play to our strengths and throw the ball to somebody who has

strengths that we don't have. (Nichelle, ll. 196-199)

Nichelle described this supportive role in terms of classroom instruction:

We have the things we are really good at and things were not good at. You know,

technology and I do not get along at all, so I go to Jose or Katey or somebody

else. I help out with National History Day (NHD) you know, I'm the English

teacher so I can help with that, you know collaborating with journalism.

(Nichelle, ll. 182-185)

Tony also described the understood accountability when teachers are hired at the

school. "The type of people that we are . . . has a lot to do with the type of school we are.

We know going in, what's expected of us" (Tony, ll. 16-17). He also referenced the stress

from the increased accountability of being the sole teacher of a content area at the high

school level. "The actual teaching part, here, is a whole lot more stressful here, having

your own classroom, especially in a science classroom" (Tony, ll. 47-48). Nichelle

described herself as a better teacher as a result of improved confidence from the increased

responsibility, coupled with a supportive community. "I don't think I was a good teacher

until I came here, you know? I think I was trying to live up to somebody else's. . . I didn't

really know. . . I didn't have the confidence" (Nichelle, ll. 35-37). She elaborated:

I probably became a better teacher coming here, because I responded to the small

school and to the warmth and to the genuine feelings here, and maybe it was

having that ultimate responsibility, you know, being the only drama teacher, the

only creative writing teacher, the only English teacher. I had to figure it out, you

know, but I had, it felt like I had the support to do that. (Nichelle, ll. 222-225)

Neale described the roles at the school through the idea of equality. He said each

teacher contributed to the community through their expertise, and every role was

connected to others and the benefit of students. "Community at our school is the idea of

equality and that we all play our own roles, but yet our roles are connected" (Neale, ll.

15-16). He continued:

As far as equality of roles, . . . teachers are more niched. Rather than having three

English teachers, three math teachers, three of everything . . . there's this sort of

someone-in-charge of each aspect of the school and supportive of doing their job,

because we see students as more of a giant puzzle, and we all have to do our piece

to support them and put their picture together. (Neale, ll. 26-30)

Both Neale and Preston addressed the solidarity that comes from serving as the

only teacher at a given grade level, and the potential for isolation when interacting with

other same-grade-level teachers outside of the school:

I am doing more to help more people. I think they get that at this school, it's not

every man for themselves. But elementary tends to be a little more like that

because we have students the entire day, and . . . I am in charge of this kid, no one

else is. Where secondary, you can be a little more supportive as far as you have

one-sixth of the student. Having worked at another school, I don't think it is. I

think the advantage of the schools I've been at outside of this is having multiple

teachers at the same grade level because they know what you're going through,

and they tend to know the kids, the grade band, whereas being the only six grade

teacher. . . it gets to the point where I know people care about me, and want to

support me, but they're not dealing with the same [students] at that time. (Neale,

ll. 180-193)

Preston also addressed the solo nature of his role that was supported through

collaboration: "There's only one class per grade. I feel like there's as much collaboration

as I've had in previous schools, but I feel like it's more intentional because we are

working across grade level bands" (Preston, ll. 76-79).

Newcomers. Tony and Preston both addressed aspects of transitioning to the

school from previous teaching positions. They explained how their roles were defined as

newcomers to the community. Tony described the introduction and challenges as a staff

new to the culture:

[It was] an internal commitment to not just the kids, but to each other . . . I've

seen some of the newer teachers come in and start to absorb . . . it's really hard

your first few years, even if you were a seasoned teacher, being in a new school is

always a change. And I can see that. I can see that happen, I can see that support, I

can see that the skill of being free to ask for help, let them teach you. (Tony, ll.

142-147)

Tony described the community as supportive of newcomers:

It comes from . . . collegiality, seeing that you know you are not going to be, I had

to use the term judged, yeah, I can't think of another term that works. Go ahead

and ask. We all have questions, you know, I can remember my first year here. I

did nothing but ask, and everybody was, yeah, sure no problem. We'll hook you

up, we'll fix you up. This is what we do, even including the office staff . . Here, I

really feel like, at least my first year, everybody . . . if they were busy would put

down their pencil or look up from the keyboard, and really give you their focus

and full attention, and I never felt like I was intruding. Or even if I was intruding,

that was okay, because you need to know this. (Tony, ll. 153-165)

Tony also recounted another teacher's experience as a newcomer:

Since I've been here, . . . only one to the most, three teachers, come at a time. I

remember when Neale came in and he seem really uptight the first three or four

weeks, and I would talk to him, and I would tell him, I know exactly what's going

through your mind . . . When is the other shoe going to drop? It's not. This is it . . .

He even came to me later some weeks later and said, wow! You're right, you

know. I was waiting for that stress level to rise and you know, it can't really be

this good, but it is. (Tony, ll. 77-84)

Preston described his experience as a teacher new to his role in the school this

year:

From the perspective of a new teacher I have felt very welcomed, and I'm

included in collaboration and discussions, but also just feeling like in the staff

room at lunches, not feeling excluded but feeling like part of the group, and so I

feel like interpersonally and professionally, I guess there's a real sense of

community among teachers and staff. (Preston, ll. 16-19)

Preston elaborated in describing the actions of the community toward him as a

newcomer:

Asking questions about me and on taking an interest in me. Where do I come

from, and just feeling like teachers are interested in me, and maybe I have

something to offer. I am just valued, I think in some places when someone is new,

relationships are more solidified in their interactions, and it is a little harder to

break that barrier. I have never felt that here. I've always felt at our school that my

opinions matter, and I am an equal member of collaboration. (Preston, ll. 28-32)

Small school. While all participants mentioned the size of the school in their

interviews, two staff described the strengths and limitations of a small school and the

impact on identity. Deborah described the size and setting and the effect on relationships:

We have the benefit of we're so small, that year after year after year, elementary

and secondary, we tend to have the same kids and families, so maybe it's easier to

build relations, but I think maybe it's something our staff, because of the setting

they're in, is something they're very strong at. (Deborah, ll. 132-134)

Deborah also described a perceived limitation when standardized test scores were

considered:

With a school as small as us, it doesn't take more than a couple [of] students

scoring low to skew everything, and you have to understand that the small-school

dynamic is so different, and for staff not to be scared, just to look at it as one more

thing we've got to plan around. (Deborah, ll. 76-78)

Nichelle also attributed the size of the school with the ease of building

relationships with students and staff:

The size of the school has everything to do with being able to really get to know

each other. You know, the small school, it's really hard . . . to develop that in a

school of 2,400 kids, and you know, 18 English teachers so, . . . being my own

department head, our meetings are very cordial . . . We value each other and

again, that's because we are [a] small enough group to get to know each other. It

comes back to that small school. (Nichelle, ll. 22-25, 211-212)

Wenger's social learning model provided a framework for the themes identified in

the five interviews. Participants described their community, participation, experiences

and relationships with others in the community, through these four themes: a) belonging,

b) practice, c) meaning, and d) identity. From these themes emerged thirteen sub-themes

that further elucidated this research.

Teacher Social Capital

Participants in the focus group interview described how their community had

affected their practice and the practice of others, and how school leadership could support

the community. Lave (2009) asserted that active participation in a group, is both a kind of

action and belonging in which learning naturally takes place, and as members move from

the peripheral to its center, they become more active and engaged within the culture. By

using the resources available to teachers as a result of their community of practice, social

capital, then, is the byproduct of relationships (Minckler, 2011).

Affected practice. Neale attributed his development as a teacher to the wider

range of perspectives available on campus with both elementary and secondary teachers,

and the opportunity for autonomy:

Getting points of view from a wider range of levels and expertise rather than just

having everyone with an elementary focus . . . on top of that, I think there is a sort

of freedom to individualize things because it's not me supporting a team of three people that have to be lockstep. (Neale, ll. 33-35)

Similarly, Deborah described how teachers were affected by the community:

They were somewhere before they came here, and they felt like they needed something else. To be honest with you, many of the staff wanted more autonomy, they wanted more creativity, they wanted to be able to personalize, so they're coming here for change as well. And for me, that makes me trust them at a high-level, because I know what they're doing is to support change and growth. I've worked at a lot of places and that's not a common thread that I have seen. (Deborah, ll. 43-48)

Preston also described the community with the same terminology of autonomy and trust. "The sense of autonomy that I feel like we have here is very obvious, and I think there's an aspect to have trust in ourselves, but also in the community that we're all working towards the same goal" (Preston, ll. 23-25).

Nichelle described herself as a better teacher and different person as a result of the community:

I don't think I became a good teacher until I came here, and I think part of it was that this is a place where you can really be yourself . . . I am a different person having worked here. I know, I know that. (Nichelle, ll. 13-14, 20-21)

School leadership support. Participants also described ways that school or district leadership could further support the community. They identified the benefit of time and structures to support collaboration such as co-teaching and intervention. Nichelle described:

We are a special place and we have those opportunities [to collaborate], but not a

lot of schools have that, where that's encouraged, and . . . it can't be just

encouraged, it has to be built into the system. You have to provide those

opportunities in a real way so that it doesn't feel like it's just lip service . . . but to

provide those real opportunities in the schedule. (Nichelle, ll. 73-77)

Preston also addressed co-teaching as a benefit. "So many of the kids are here for

so many years that continuing to implement co-teaching strategies intentionally . . . a lot

of relationships can be formed given the structure of the school" (Preston, ll. 79-84).

Deborah further described the benefit of supporting dedicated time for co-teaching and

intervention:

Piggybacking on co-teaching, the reason that it is working is that the leadership

has planned in actual time for people to be able to do that, because everybody

likes to support each other, but having actual time blocked out to do it within your

day is really important. Having time blocked out for some people to do a higher

level of intervention with other students, so that the teachers have a little extra

support, that is essential. (Deborah, ll. 86-90)

At the same time, participants acknowledged feeling constrained by mandated

meetings:

In teaching, you start to see things that lose their authenticity, and some of it

comes down to the bureaucracy of what we do, of having to have to have x

number of meetings for this long and provide notes. When I think back to [when

I] first started teaching, I had some such valuable meetings, because I chose to go

meet with someone and strategize and plan. (Neale, ll. 110-114)

The benefit of validation and positivity were also described by participants:

The district, in particular, could be more visible and present physically . . . [This]

is sort of a little . . . school. It's not the first place they would stop by . . . I feel

like when you work really hard and your passion[ate] about kids, you want people

to see that, and I think the teachers here would love to be recognized more in a

present way. (Neale, ll. 58-62)

Nichelle also described the need for recognition:

I think it's so important that you know us. I've been in buildings where . . . I'm

wondering if the principal even knows my name . . . we want the same things our

students want. We want to be seen, we want to be valued . . . and it's not just

recognition. It's just, I see what you're doing, and I acknowledge that . . . just to

have that kind of a personal connection. (Nichelle, ll. 99-105)

Deborah explained the benefit of encouragement:

About the positive spin to what our culture is like, the principal does an excellent

job of making sure that she does kudos and recognize what we're doing . . .

encouraging the staff to give each other positive comments, because that just

spins off of us feeling more positively about each other . . . bringing out the

positives from the staff about each other is a really good thing. (Deborah, ll. 120-

124)

Neale described the benefit of positivity, too:

So many places we've been, there's teachers who focus on the negative, the kids

that have struggles. And yes, its human nature to vent, but . . . staying on the

positive, how much we love teaching, how much we love working with kids. And

when you do something like that, it kind of feeds into what we're going to do in our classrooms, or how we talk about school, so I like the positivity. (Neale, ll. 130-134)

Participants described how their community had affected their practice and the practice of others, and how school leadership could support the community. Among others, they included benefits from collaboration and intentional leadership decisions that supported the community.

Chapter Five

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

In this study, the researcher examined and described how communities of practice, grounded in situated learning theory, generated social capital through the relationships that develop through belonging, practice, meaning, and identity. Social capital is the idea that relationships are a valuable asset (Smith, 2009). The teachers interviewed in this study were public school teachers at the same school serving students at the elementary and secondary levels. The method of qualitative case study research was employed for this study. Participants were interviewed twice during the month of February 2019, first in an individual interview, followed by a group interview. Three participants were male and two were female. The ages of the participants ranged from 34 to 65 years old, and their number of years of teaching experience ranged from six to twenty-two years. While none of the participants was a first-year teacher, one participant was new to the school this year.

Through this study, the researcher aimed to address the research questions examining how communities of practice generated teacher social capital. More specifically, the researcher explored how teachers described their community of practice through the lens of legitimate peripheral participation, how teachers connected their trajectory to social capital, and the implications for school leaders to grow social capital through communities of practice.

Through the first question, the researcher asked how teachers described their community of practice. Through the second question, the researcher examined how

communities of practice generated teacher social capital, and through the third question, the researcher explored the implications for school leaders to grow teacher social capital through communities of practice. Four themes based on Wenger's social learning system, also characteristic of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), were evident through an analysis of the interview transcripts. They were as follows: a) belonging, b) practice, c) meaning, and d) identity. From these themes also emerged thirteen sub-themes that further described the community of practice at this school. Participant responses during the focus group interview described how the community affected their practice, or trajectory. Participants also described ways school leaders could support the community. These themes and their subsequent sub-themes, and their relationship to the three research questions are discussed throughout this chapter.

Community of practice teacher descriptions. The researcher asked teachers in the first question to describe their community of practice. In a community of practice, connections with community members produce a collective practice and a shared accountability (Baker-Eveleth et al., 2011). Further, these communities of practice exhibit four characteristics: a) attachment to the community (belonging), b) engagement by involvement (practice), c) shared experiences that create common understanding (meaning), and d) becoming a part of something (identity) (Wenger, 1998). Within these four characteristics, codified as themes, all five of the participants' responses included descriptions that aligned as sub-themes. Of the sub-themes, three, specifically, were discussed by every participant including the importance of *belonging* within their community, *practice* through engagement, and the *role* of the individual necessitating interdependence on each other.

The researcher's analysis of the responses by all five participants regarding community acceptance and attachment aligned with Wenger's (1998) suggestion that this sense of belonging reinforces the value or importance of participation. Participants reported feeling a stronger sense of community at this school compared to previous schools. They discussed this attachment through descriptive words including the following: safe, valued, accepted, close, strong, relational, complete, cohesive. Participants attributed this sense to the relational nature of staff, shared expectations, and friendships among colleagues.

All five participants also addressed practice through engagement and noted they believed they have experienced meaningful changes in their ability as a result of the community (Wenger, 1998). Participants contrasted the top-down feel of the district-implemented PLC practice with the non-manufactured, organic nature of the school's community of practice. Participants said their practice was improved as a result of their community involvement. They also commented that they learned from each other and collaboration enhanced their own instruction. One participant said she was a better teacher as a result and would not still be a teacher if it were not for the school community.

The role of the individual as an aspect of identity was also addressed by all five participants. Wenger (1998) asserted the personal identity of the individual became more in line with the community as shared experiences created a common view that encompassed who the members have been and what they valued. Participants addressed the high expectations they have of themselves and others and noted the necessity of assuming multiple responsibilities and wearing many hats as part of their role. One

participant stated the need to safeguard against teacher burnout, and another said his teaching role in this school is more challenging than his previous assignment. They also acknowledge they are niched, or valued for their expertise, and rely on collaboration with each other in order to fulfill their roles. Their willingness to assume these responsibilities is a result of support from the community.

While not comprehensively addressed by all five participants, another sub-theme that surfaced as notable included the need for trust. During the individual interviews, it was worthy to note the only participant who did not address the topic of trust within the community was the teacher who is new to the school this year. However, during the focus group interview, he did describe the need for teachers to have trust in themselves and in the community. Participants also said trust enabled them to be open to new ideas and try new instructional strategies in their classrooms, including co-teaching and project-based learning. Trust is also necessary in a school where teachers are solely responsible for all students in one grade level or content area. Others described the trust within the community as something to be protected. They said they would go to great lengths to guard the community that has grown collegially and personally close, even likening the relationship to family. If someone is struggling, however, participants described that genuine care and a tolerance for idiosyncrasies allowed staff to be supported. This provides a safety net for teachers to be vulnerable and make mistakes, and in the process, builds confidence within of the community.

The informal nature of engagement within the community was described by participants as a means of practice. It is also described by Baker-Eveleth et al. (2011) as behaviors that sustain the community, and "sharing so-called war stories, informal

discussions, and sending email or text messages are techniques to be utilized by members

of the group" (p. 34). Participants referred often to lunchtime conversations that resulted

in supportive practices, even if they originated as grumbling. Another participant said that

the informal engagement with colleagues benefitted their formalized work, noting it was

less awkward if teachers had relationships outside of structured meetings.

While informal opportunities for building community were described, participants

also noted the benefit and constraint of structures, including scheduled time within the

day for collaboration. Decisions by leaders impacting these structures were described by

participants. A participant noted through the intentionality of reserving time within the

school day for teachers to work together, the leader communicated that collaboration was

valued. Another participant discussed the building structure and the ease of connecting

with the teacher in the adjacent classroom, but the not with the rest of the staff. He said

he made time to visit other teachers in their classrooms, but the layout of the building did

not easily lend itself well to this purpose.

The uniqueness of the community and its small size were also described by the

participants and connected to its identity. While most discussed the uniqueness in

positive terms, others pointed out the additional challenges of serving a population of

students who have not experienced success elsewhere. Another alluded to feeling isolated

from same grade level colleagues, although he also said the benefits of working here had

enabled him to make a greater difference for students. One participant also noted that the

uniqueness of the small school can result in skewed standardized test scores if just a few

students perform poorly.

Teacher descriptions of their community of practice were analyzed through Wenger's (1991) social learning framework including: a) belonging, b) practice, c) meaning and d) identity, and the subsequently emerging sub-themes. These descriptions helped inform how communities of practice generate teacher social capital in the following section.

Generating teacher social capital. Through the second question, the researcher sought to connect communities of practice with the generation of teacher social capital. For the purpose of this analysis, Minckler's definition of teacher social capital is used, and is defined as the resources available to and used by the teacher through membership in a community of practice to produce outcomes that are beneficial to the teacher, her students, and ultimately the school community as a whole (Minckler, 2014). While teachers were not directly asked questions about generating teacher social capital during the individual interview, their responses provided insight to the possibilities. The focus group interview questions, however, were more closely aligned with the benefits to members through legitimate peripheral participation and the implications for school leadership.

The participants identified practice through engagement as an opportunity to benefit their own abilities in the classroom, and specified informal opportunities were also valuable. Additionally, participants connected motivation with their community and referenced the term, motivation, twelve times in their collective transcripts. Adler and Kwon (2002) identify opportunity, motivation, and ability as three sources of social capital. Minckler (2011) elaborated, stating if social capital is to develop, teachers need: a) opportunity to form and develop working relationships, b) the motivation to work with

other teachers to improve teaching and learning in the school, and c) the ability through competencies and resources to share with other teachers. If these three elements are present, the development of teacher social capital will follow.

Participants identified the development of social capital through opportunities, motivation, and their improved abilities generated through the community. Participants said opportunities to form and develop relationships with their colleagues included informal collaboration such as in lunchroom conversations and structured collaboration through co-teaching practices and intervention teamwork. Participants described the relationships that formed within the community created a high level of trust and freedom to be themselves with one another while growing in their practice, or trajectory. Key motivating factors described by the participants included encouragement from within the community and school leadership, and acknowledgement of their work. Participants said this type of recognition was motivating, created a personal connection, and was a reminder of their love for teaching. Participants also noted positivity through encouragement was then reflected in the classroom. Opportunities, too, for collaboration affected their practice and strengthened their abilities through access to broader perspectives, increased autonomy, and the expertise of teachers at multiple levels on one campus.

Implications for School Leaders

Through the third question, the researcher explored implications for school leaders to grow social capital through communities of practice. Minckler (2011) asserted the quality of leadership determined the quality of social capital generated, and whether it was harnessed for organizational effectiveness. Based on Adler and Kwon's (2002) three

sources of social capital—opportunity, motivation, and ability, this study has implications for school leaders.

      Opportunity. Participants in this study identified perceived differences in district-mandated professional learning communities (PLCs) and their communities of practice. While participants said they valued collaboration and the opportunity to build relationships with their colleagues, they resented the top-down nature of regularly-scheduled, mandated meetings with the requirement to submit meeting minutes in a specific format. Instead, they described the benefit of scheduled opportunities within the school day for team planning and collaboration. Examples included shared teacher preparation time, arranged co-teaching, and intervention planning. Participants described meetings as beneficial if they included choice, autonomy, and informality.

      Subsequently, school leaders can play a pivotal role in creating and sustaining the conditions necessary to foster teacher social capital. Providing time structures within the schedule for collaboration that allows teachers flexibility and autonomy enables them to work together and create a system of learning built on relationships (Smith, 2009). For example, leaders can provide opportunity for teacher communities to conduct the work they see necessary such as collaboratively identifying and planning interventions for students, as in the case of the participants in this study.

      Motivation. School leaders also influence the social structure of the school through establishing values and norms. Whether the norms and values of the network of teachers support collaboration, capacity building and student achievement is up to leadership (Minckler, 2014). Leadership may also affect teacher motivation (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). In this study, participants reported acknowledgements, positive feedback

and supportive decisions were all motivating for them. Participants noted they felt supported and motivated when the leader's words, attitude, and action were aligned. One participant provided an example of the leader listening to concerns of truthtellers in a staff meeting and inviting push-back. Another described a time when test scores dipped, the principal's actions were not punitive toward staff, but supportive.

Consequently, leaders who know the names of staff, are present in classrooms, and develop caring, professional relationships exemplify what is valued within a community. Leaders can model this alignment of words, attitude and action to motivate teachers within the community.

Ability. Communities of practice can strengthen the skills and abilities of teachers and contribute to their social capital. Collaboration necessitates a broadening scope of the traditional understanding of teaching abilities. For example, leadership support of communities of practice can lead to increased teacher skills in communication, conflict resolution, teambuilding, team leadership, and problem solving (Minckler, 2011). Increased skill also accompanies confidence. Participants described their practice as improving as a result of the community, and confidence plays a critical role in either constraining or enabling the development of teacher identity (Harlow & Cobb, 2014).

School leaders can help develop teacher skills and confidence through providing teachers with the opportunity to observe their colleagues who can serve as role models, engage in co-teaching professional development and practice, provide positive feedback, and support the development of communities of practice.

When opportunity, motivation and ability converge, teachers can collaborate to share resources and increase the teaching capacity of the community. When these

relationships are formalized, the impact is more likely to be effective (Minckler, 2014).

Moreover, school leaders can use opportunity, motivation and ability as levers to develop

a school environment where teacher social capital flourishes.

Teacher retention. High levels of teacher social capital should result in positive

outcomes of student achievement, teacher quality, and teacher job satisfaction (Minckler,

2011). While this study did not include an examination of these outcomes, teacher job

satisfaction is of particular importance as it relates to the need to attract and retain

teachers in the field of education. Participants within this study referenced their previous

community experiences at different schools and described their current community of

practice as significantly improved and beneficial to their practice. One participant said

she would not be teaching today if it were not for her teacher community. While findings

connected to teacher retention were limited, it is worthy of further research.

Limitations

This case study included only five teachers from one public school. The school is

also considered a small school with an unconventional grade level configuration and

staffing model. While generalizations cannot be drawn from this case study, the study

may provide insight for future researchers. Moreover, while the gender and age span of

the participants were similar to the rest of the staff, all participants identified as

caucasian. Future studies in this area should aim to include greater diversity in minority

participants.

Most significantly, while the participants were all teacher volunteers and all staff

were invited to participate, the sole interviewer was also their principal and evaluator. For

this reason, it should be acknowledged that participants' responses could have been influenced by the perception of a supervisory figure conducting the interview.

Areas for Further Research

Through this case study, the researcher examined how teachers in a small school described their community of practice, how communities of practice generate social capital, and the implications for school leaders. Participants represented the demographics of the staff, multiple grade levels, and content areas. The findings of this study may inform leaders about generating social capital within communities of practice.

Additional research is needed to further explore the connections between communities of practice, teacher social capital, and the resulting outcomes. For example, qualitative studies could examine the outcomes of job satisfaction, teacher retention, and teacher quality. As addressed in Chapter One of this study, attracting and retaining teachers in the profession, and particularly specific areas such as math, science, and special education, is a growing need. The increasing staffing needs within the teaching workforce, examined through the perspective of the social network of relationships in schools as a means of building social capital (Vorhaus, 2014), continues to be a topic for further research.

This case study included teachers at the elementary, middle and high school levels and in varying content areas. However, studies at a specific level or larger school could explore differences between the contexts and the relationship between communities of practice and teacher social capital.

While this study examined the generation of social capital through teacher communities of practice, expanding to a broader context to include total school social capital, or district social capital could inform system and organizational leadership.

Lastly, the definition for teacher social capital in this study did not address the type, or nature, of the social capital. Communities of practice are temporal and have life cycles (Wenger, 1998). An emerging toxic culture might result in values that are detrimental to performance and student achievement. Researchers could examine the presence of both positive social capital and negative social capital within a community.

Conclusion

The researcher investigated how teachers described their community of practice, how communities of practice generate social capital, and the implications for school leaders. Participants, including teachers from the same school, provided insight on the development of social capital within their community.

Four themes were selected based on Wenger's social learning system and are also characteristic of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). They were as follows: a) belonging, b) practice, c) meaning, and d) identity. From these themes also emerged thirteen sub-themes that further described the community of practice at this school. Participant responses during the focus group interview described how the community affected their practice, or trajectory. Participants also described ways school leaders could support the community. The emerging themes aligned with other qualitative studies examining communities of practice (Baker-Eveleth et al., 2011; Cuddapah & Clayton, 2011; Harlow & Cobb, 2014). This researcher, however, examined how communities of practice generate social capital, and provided implications for school leaders to grow

social capital to benefit teachers. While the researcher's results supported the tenets of a social learning system and the convergence of opportunity, motivation, and ability to generate social capital, the connections to teacher retention were limited.

The researcher's learning. As an embedded researcher who is also the principal of the school in this study, a key learning emerged for her that further elucidates communities of practice. Prior to conducting this research, the principal would have considered herself as an outsider, privileged to observe this community of practice. The principal came to the realization, however, that she had been a member within this community of practice all along, since she was hired at the school six years ago. She was not on the outside, but an actual participant.

Upon her hiring, the principal was welcomed as a newcomer to her role. During her first year, the staff amicably continued their community practice despite the principal's efforts to impose PLCs upon them. The community's ability to sustain their practice while allowing the principal limited participation aligned with the idea that newcomers tend to engage on the periphery until they demonstrate competence (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Wenger (2000) describes that it is through "knowing" that competence is displayed within the community.

The descriptions of leadership provided by participants, including authenticity, building relationships, and developing trust within the community defined the competence necessary for the researcher's trajectory within the community. It was through demonstrating these leadership traits over subsequent years that the principal's participation allowed her further access within the community. Based on the descriptions

of the participants as members, the principal demonstrated the essential "knowing" to be considered an old-timer (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Teachers learn together through sharing knowledge and experience through mutual engagement in a community of practice. Scholars remain committed to the view that it is the interacting members who make the maintenance and reproduction of this social asset possible, and they share an understanding that social capital consists of resources embedded in social relations and social structure (Lin, 2001). Social capital, then, is a function of the informal organization of teachers, and can be harnessed to benefit a school. While a leader can force relationships through assigned groups within rigid constructs, relationships tend to grow better when people like each other. Supporting communities of practice can benefit positive, professional relationships and foster the growth of teacher social capital.

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Appendix A

Email Invitation to Participants and Informed Consent

Dear (Name),

Thank you for your expressed willingness to participate in a study about the teacher community and culture at this school. Through this study, I am seeking to understand teacher perspectives of our social learning network so that school and district administrators can better support teacher communities. Since you are in a unique position to share your views and insights, I am thankful for your willingness to participate in the following way:

Participate in a one-on-one interview and a focus group interview. The one-on-one interview will be about 20 minutes and the group interview will be about 20 - 30 minutes.

Both will be outside of school hours. We can arrange the one-on-one interview at a time and location convenient to you between now and February 16, 2019.

The group interview date and time will be determined soon based on the availability of participants. While 4 - 5 participants are anticipated, all certificated staff are invited to volunteer.

I will provide you with an informed consent document and the questions for you to review prior to our interview date. Participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time. All information will be kept confidential.

Please let me know what time and dates works best for your one-on-one interview. I've listed some dates/times that are currently available:

2:40 – 3:15pm on January 30, February 1, 4, 8, 11, 13, 14, or 15

Thank you again for your consideration of participating in this study.

Appreciatively,

Stephanie Knip**p**

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INFORMED CONSENT

Title of the Study: A Case Study of Communities of Practice in Schools

Principal Investigator: Stephanie Knipp, Student, sknipp@spu.edu, (206)276-4399
Co-Investigator: Dr. John Bond, bondj@spu.edu, (206)261-2554

DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH

The purpose of the research is to explore and describe teacher communities of practice. The investigator is seeking to examine possible themes that emerge that would help building and district administrators support teacher communities for the purpose of retaining teachers in the profession. This study will provide insight on teacher perspectives about their communities of practice and their social learning networks. You have been invited to participate because you are a certificated staff member at the school selected for this study.

This study will include males and females between the ages of 22 and 67.

The research will take place at Seattle Pacific University, 3307 3rd Ave West, Seattle WA and at Kent Mountain View Academy, 22420 Military Road South, Des Moines, WA.

WHAT WILL MY PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?

If you decide to participate in this research you will be asked to participate in one, one-on-one interview and one, focus group interview. The interviews will be no more than 30 minutes each. We can arrange the interviews at a time and a location convenient to you between now and February 16, 2019. These interviews will be audio-recorded. You may withdraw from the study at any time. In addition, you will be invited to offer feedback on initial written transcriptions for accuracy should you choose.

- ☐ Yes, I give my permission for the interviews to be audio-recorded
- ☐ Yes, I give my permission for the interviews to be transcribed
- ☐ No, I do not give my permission for the interviews to be audio-recorded

ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO ME?

There are no known major risks to your participation in this research study.

Seattle Pacific University and associated researchers do not offer to reimburse participants for medical claims or other compensation. If physical injury is suffered in the course of research, or for more information, please notify the investigator in charge, (Stephanie Knipp (206) 276-4399).

Participant's Initials _____

Page 1 of 2

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO ME?

We do not anticipate direct benefits; however, your participation will contribute to an understanding of teacher communities of practice and how administrators can support them, and you may derive satisfaction from your contribution.

HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?

The results of this study will be written and presented in the Principal Investigator's dissertation. While there may be publications as a result of this study, your name will not be used, nor will you be identified in any way. The information in the study records will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to persons conducting the study unless you specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study. Your de-identified data may be used in future research, presentations or for teaching purposes by the Principal Investigator listed above.

WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

You may ask any questions about the research at any time. If you have questions about the research, you should contact the Principal Investigator, (Stephanie Knipp (206) 276-4399).

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, you should contact the Seattle Pacific University Institutional Review Board Chair at 206.281.2201 or IRB@spu.edu.

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you begin participation and change your mind you may end your participation at any time without penalty. You may elect not to answer specific questions in the interviews.

Your signature indicates that you have read this consent form, had an opportunity to ask any questions about your participation in this research, and voluntarily consent to participate. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Participant's Name (please print): _____

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

PI's Name (please print): Stephanie Knipp

PI's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Copies to: Participant   Principal Investigator

Appendix B

Interview Questions

Individual Interview Questions:

1. Describe the sense of teacher community at our school. For this purpose, sense of community is defined as a feeling that members have of belonging and being important to each other, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met by the commitment to be together.

2. How is the teacher culture shaped in our school? Culture includes norms, values and beliefs.

3. What opportunities do teachers have to collaborate to impact teaching and learning?

4. Describe the skills that comprise the teaching ability in our school.

5. What motivates teachers in our school?

Focus Group Interview Questions:

1. How has the teacher community here at this school affected your practice?

2. How can school or district leadership support this teacher community?

Appendix C

Interview Transcripts

Teacher 1 [Pseudo name Deborah]; Female; 59 years; 22 years of experience; 15 years at this school; certificated support staff
2/18/19; 3:00pm; Interviewed by Stephanie Knipp

1   *To start, can you state your name and acknowledge that you are being recorded.*
2
3   My name is [Deborah] and I acknowledge that I am being recorded.
4
5   *The first question is: Describe the sense of our teacher community at our school. And for*
6   *this purpose, sense of community is defined as a feeling that members have of belonging,*
7   *of being important to each other, and a shared faith that members needs will be met by*
8   *the commitment to be together.*
9
10 I feel that our sense of community at our school is extremely strong. I've worked at five
11 different buildings in this school district, and our school is by far the strongest
12 community, and when you asked me that question, I'm thinking about—where is that
13 coming from? What is it make of? I think one of the things is we are so small, we don't
14 have a person to handle every issue or situation that comes up so because of that we have
15 to cross purposes, and take on roles that we typically wouldn't take, and that involves
16 interacting with a lot of different people so I think that helps people to feel connected and
17 important to each other. Because, it's not like you can just look the other way and expect
18 someone else to handle it. You kind of have to jump in there. Something else I would say
19 that I've seen in the building is that frequently, they will go to each other before going to
20 an outside source like the district. Because being so small, and being so unique, I think
21 that sometimes people don't get us, and that we're so connected within each other they
22 were more trusting of ideas or seeking help from people within the building than outside,
23 and that's an example of the belonging and feeling connected to each other. Another one I
24 would point out. . . do you want a couple of examples? Another example I would use is,
25 we found out this year that we're moving sites type of a thing. And until people were
26 really feeling confident that we were all moving together, it was a bit of a freak out at the
27 building. But then when people realized that we're all going, that was calming. Whenever
28 people get upset, and they get nervous, someone will say, remember, we're all going
29 together, and they all laugh. So that's an example of that. I also seen the commitment to
30 be together, the co-teaching thing, I'll have to tell you for me, it's like I don't have time
31 for this, but I am so excited with how much the building teachers are excited to work
32 together and help each other feel each other's needs through the co-teaching. Some people

33   have time built-in, but other people, like Joe, are just doing it, type of a thing. And they
34   have to take the time to plan for that, and I think that's just really cool. And if I had to
35   think of, you said view this question under the guise of what leadership can do, I think
36   they have that commitment I would say, providing time and removing obstacles. And I
37   think our building principal, Stephanie Knipp, does a very good time of building in time
38   for people to be able to cross teach you where your plan time is being the flexibility to
39   letting people have the time to get to know each other I think is a is a really it's one of the
40   reasons that that happens.

41

42   *So that sounds like that structure is beneficial.*

43

44   Absolutely, and having to go out of the way like even giving a couple of hours for
45   intervention, so that the intervention people can go in and help to meet a need. Even if
46   it's not their subject, or maybe take the class so that the teacher can do it. There are a lot
47   of different ways and I think that time issue, whether it be through an interventionist or
48   co-teaching or me as a counselor, I've gone in sometimes, and done things that co-
49   teachers do. I never have to worry that you think I should be doing something else
50   because if someone sees a need you don't question that they want to do it.

51

52   *So next question: How is the teacher culture shaped in our school? And school culture*
53   *includes norms, values, and beliefs.*

54

55   That's a good question. We don't have a ton of teacher turnover, but we've had some in
56   the last, little bit because we had some people leave. I think the shaping of it starts with
57   the leadership—actually, with you. Your focus on student growth and taking kids of
58   individuals, and their needs are our top priority. We tolerate a lot of stuff but being
59   unkind to kids is not one of them. All the staff knows, and they are, when you think about
60   it, they're student-centered. They make positive comments and celebrate success, and
61   plan for the details. Basically, I would say. If you want examples, that's my overall
62   statement, but look at the staff meetings. How we do problem-solving, and it goes out of
63   the box, you do the thing with the common ground statements with each other, We try
64   and build off the positive. That's really important. I think another thing we do is validate
65   each other. But also, you as a principal do a really good job of helping everybody on their
66   staff to use their strengths. So I'm just going to be blunt, we have a couple of staff
67   members who would want to do everything and control everything, and you do a really
68   good job of making sure everybody has a chance to use their expertise. And that helps
69   some people not to burn out. An example I would use is Ahren heading up the move.
70   Brilliant, because it makes her feel so important and validated and a couple of other
71   people who were like, why didn't I get to do it? But giving people who have a different
72   skill with her military background—she's a perfect fit! And we wouldn't think about that

73 unless you look closer. And I think you do a really good job of making sure that different
74 people have different chances to do things instead of always one person. You know, the
75 usual leadership people. Also, when you're looking at how our staffing meetings go or
76 you know those ways we use those Wednesday trainings. If we have something that's not
77 quite right, like if a certain number of test scores are down, you don't come down on the
78 people, you look at it as like what the barriers, what we need to do, like problem solving
79 instead of punitive. And I think that help people to keep their norms, values and beliefs
80 going towards that positive, like everybody-can-grow philosophy, instead of being
81 concerned about getting dinged. With a school as small as us, it doesn't take more than a
82 couple student scoring low to skew everything, and you have to understand that the
83 small-school dynamic is so different and for staff not to be scared, just to look at it as one
84 more thing we've got to plan around. So, when you asked how it shaped, it shaped by
85 student-centered, they are our priorities, and barriers only mean problem-solving. If
86 everyone goes forward with that attitude, we'll be fine.

87

88 *So that is a segue into the next question. You talked about our Wednesday meeting times*
89 *and co-teaching. So, question three asks what opportunities do teachers have to*
90 *collaborate to impact teaching and learning? So, what are some of those ways?*

91

92 So, what are some of those specific things? We'll I did talk about the Wednesday thing
93 and co-teaching and PLCs are good, but I kind of think that people treat those as top
94 down. I don't think there is quite the gusto in those. But I will say, of the PLCs, I think
95 the flag team is awesome and anybody is welcome to come to a flag team meeting, but to
96 have time for our little group, we have a very diverse group from the PE to the counselor
97 to the EA to the language teacher, we have a very varied group. It allows us to get a peek
98 from the top and collaborate with the other people on something as even as small as
99 grades, because in our school, we're so small, we can't have failure because of the make-
100 up ability. So, we work super hard on making sure students are successful. And that isn't
101 just the flag team, the flag team spreads the information out to other people and works
102 with other people to get things turned around, I think that's another chance to… even
103 though it seems like just a monitoring team, to be a collaborative team. I think everything
104 we do is collaborative. For example, the special ed teachers work so closely with the
105 regular ed teachers, we have collaboration with the aides in there talking with the
106 teachers, gathering information and bringing it back to the special ed teachers.

107

108 *Those are great examples and very specific. Are there any informal ways that you see*
109 *collaboration happen?*

110

111 You know, as funny as it sounds, I've actually seen it in the lunchroom. We'll all be
112 sitting down for lunch and someone brings something up even if it starts as a grumble and

113 then someone else says, well I did this and it worked really well, and ahh, I'll try that,
114 too. So, the lunchroom is a spot where I've seen that. And I know that they have Friday
115 get-togethers and even though I don't attend them myself, and they talk about students at
116 that time as well. I'm trying to think about other times that I've seen informal ones.
117 Sometimes, we'll have small group-like meetings and call parents in. I wouldn't call it an
118 SST but, what would I call it? We had one for the young man, you know. I'd call it a
119 parent support meeting. We gather ideas first as a staff about what we're going to do,
120 then we have the parent support meeting and a meet-back time. And along each of those
121 steps, we have to collaborate, and we include the parents again. And all the talking when
122 you see a parent on campus, we'll pull them aside and talk with them. It's not just
123 collaboration with staff, it's with parents, too.
124
125 *That kind of sets the stage for question four: Describe the skills that comprise the*
126 *teaching ability in our school.*
127
128 That is a big question! Our teachers' abilities are wide and varied. I think one of the skills
129 that is the strongest, and I've worked in a lot of buildings, is the engagement piece. Our
130 teachers have engaged students. You can feel it when you walk into the classroom, it's
131 easy to see, and that's a really strong skill. They also use a lot of project-based learning.
132 Look at what Jen does, what Jose does, I look at what Shae does. They do a lot of project-
133 based things. I know they also vary their instructional practices a lot. Like in Nichelle's
134 classroom, they might just be reading. Sometimes they're writing. Sometimes she has
135 them do everything from pack a suitcase for a trip to wherever they're reading and the
136 book was set. And sometimes she goes very off the radar and sometimes she's very
137 traditional, but they vary it a lot. They tend to have a lot of presentations which I think is
138 cool. Their teaching abilities are to scope and foster a student's ability to present, get up,
139 and speak. I've worked in a lot of buildings and we have a lot of student presentations
140 here. I think I would say that a skill that the staff has as a whole is relational with students
141 and families. We have the benefit of we're so small, that year after year after year,
142 elementary and secondary, we tend to have the same kids and families, so maybe it's
143 easier to build relations, but I think maybe it's something our staff, because of the setting
144 they're in, is something they're very strong at. They assume that they can build that
145 relationship. We tease and say that if you just love on them enough, they'll come around.
146 I think they have strong problem-solving abilities. Because we're so small, sometimes
147 with remediation or extra tutoring, we get extremely creative, there's a creative approach,
148 creative skills in remediation, and we're really strong in that, too.
149
150 *How would you describe the teachers' skills and interactions with each other?*
151

152   It's probably the best this year than it's ever been. I can honestly say they all seem to be
153   getting along really well and they reach out to each other, they offer suggestions, they're
154   willing to go into each other's' classrooms, it's that co-teaching thing, I've never seen
155   anything like it in the whole time I've been there, with the stuff they are doing.
156
157   *And that brings us to the last question: What motivates teachers in our school?*
158
159   When I think of what motivates them to strive hard, work hard, and also to stay there, you
160   know, everybody loves watching students grow, and we have such a mixed bag of
161   students, and they all come in at a different place, and we have a lot of students who have
162   had issues at other places come in, but to watch them come in and join in on our culture,
163   that is very cool. I think the small learning environment, because its small, doesn't mean
164   it's any easier, you might have a few less kids in your classroom, but the kids in the
165   classroom have extra challenges. So, I think that small environment keeps a lot of our
166   staff wanting to be there and motivated. For me, personally, being able to reach students
167   that have not been successful in other schools, that is really big for me. In a strange sense,
168   it's easy to work with the kids that everything goes well, but when you look at turning
169   kids around who haven't done well in any place they've been, that is extremely
170   motivating. In talking about what motivates us, this is something that we should watch
171   for in the move. People find it motivating to do things our way. Because we have a
172   unique staff and a unique student population, and its motivating to stick together and
173   continue to do what we know works with our staff and our students. I know a lot of
174   people are concerned that if they go with someplace else, that it would be harder to have
175   the say to do it our way. And that motivates people to stay.
176
177   *All right, well Deborah, those are the questions that I have, and you were super helpful*
178   *and informative and I'm really, really appreciative of your time. Thank you so much and*
179   *enjoy the rest of your break.*

       Teacher 2 [Pseudo name Nichelle]; Female; 65 years; 19 years of experience; 7 years at
       this school; secondary teacher
       2/15/19; 10:00am; Interviewed by Stephanie Knipp

1   *SK: To start, can you state your name and acknowledge that you are being recorded.*
2
3   My name is [Nichelle] and I acknowledge that I am being recorded
4
5   *Thank you so much for your willingness to participate in this interview. I am truly*
6   *grateful for your assistance. With that, so what this is going to look like—it's about 20*
7   *minutes. I'll just ask you some questions. I will follow the five, but then we can go off*

script if needed. I'm going to pass this over to you, and then ask you some questions. All
right, first question, Nichelle, can you describe the sense of our teacher community at our
school, and for this purpose, the sense of community is defined as a feeling that members
have of belonging and being important to each other, and a shared faith that members
needs will be met by the commitment to be together.

13

14 So, first of all, I feel very attached to the school, and I've never felt as attached to a school
15 and a staff. I mean, where else when I dress up like the yellow brick road or an Elvis
16 record or Ghostbusters? I never participated in those kinds of activities, school spirit
17 things in my other schools, so just that is for me is telling you know, that I feel safe
18 enough. I feel welcomed, encouraged to do silly stuff. And I just witnessed the, you
19 know, the hundreds of texts that flew by this week with snow days. I mean it was like,
20 you know, in groups of 25, you know, every time something happened. So, every day we
21 were in contact with each other, you know, knowing what's going on with each other, so I
22 feel like I have friendships here as well as colleagues and I've never had that with any
23 other school. I mean the closest I've come to that kind of community is when I worked in
24 theater a small company, so I think the size of the school has everything to do with being
25 able to really get to know each other. You know, the small school, it's really hard I think
26 to develop that in a school of 2,400 kids, and you know, 18 English teachers so, you
27 know, being my own department head, our meetings are very cordial. So I think you
28 know, I just feel I feel like we have a really strong sense of community and we know
29 what each other is going through in family life as well as school life and we're pretty
30 supportive of each other and try to you know, take up the slack when somebody's having
31 a hard time and that's I think that is a genuine thing that's come from this place.

32

33 *So, question two: How is the culture shaped at our school? You addressed some of that,*
34 *but maybe speak more to how the culture is shaped in our school. School culture includes*
35 *norms, values, and beliefs.*

36

37 I think this is also the first school where I felt safe enough to be myself. I don't think I
38 was a good teacher until I came here, you know? I think I was trying to live up to
39 somebody else's. . . I didn't really know, I don't know, I didn't have the confidence. So,
40 part of it and you know, it's a part of it is just the size again the size of the school. We
41 know each other, and you know, messages from the top. My very first complement as a
42 teacher came from you. And this is after being a teacher for 20 some years. So that you
43 know, I mean on paper, I don't know, I think leadership is, well it's kind of like with kids.
44 If you're seen, and if you're acknowledged, then you want to work harder, you want to
45 figure out how to be a good teacher or a good student, and I just never experienced that in
46 other schools. I started at the junior high where the discussion was, we need combat pay,
47 and then I went to the high school, which is huge, and then—what is it called? I was

48 moved three times. So, the third time, I applied to the school twice and was turned down,
49 so the third time, they had to take me as an involuntary transfer. And it was in also the
50 reason I got my masters and teaching credential was because I was teaching college
51 before, and you don't need to be a teacher to teach college—that's a little scary, but I
52 volunteered in the fifth-grade class, doing drama, and I decided, and it was this school
53 that made me decide to want to go back to school and get my credential, so and then it
54 took me 12 years teaching other places before I got finally here. But that was always my
55 goal, to teach here.
56
57 *So, what was it about the school that drew you in and then 12 years later you're still*
58 *wanting to be here?*
59
60 That's a good question. I think I'm in part of it was the teachers and the fact that it was an
61 elementary and secondary, the fact that I think the size has everything to do with it
62 because you know from the time I volunteered it was clear that the teachers were
63 connecting with each other. And it's just hard to find that in big schools. So, I think that
64 was part of it. My sister was a volunteer here. She was doing a horticulture at the time in
65 the good old days when you could be anybody and teach, which was great so her and her
66 kids were here, so I had a family connection and my dad had a history here. So part of it
67 was that, but more but I think you know from the beginning the school from can I
68 remember going to a meeting when it first started and they were just talking about what
69 they wanted it to be and that this was a different kind of school and we supported families
70 and we supported kids who were coming from homeschool situations or kids who didn't
71 fit in other schools, so I've always been a weirdo, so you know. I wanted to go to my
72 dad's school, but I wasn't pregnant, and I wasn't a delinquent, so I couldn't get in. You
73 know, so that you know I mean his stories they played volleyball, the whole school
74 would stop in the afternoon and play volleyball, because it was it was 100 then or 50
75 maybe when it's for started. So, it was always, you know, it's always been kind of the
76 gold standard for me, but it took me a long time to get here. I never gave up. So, I was
77 really lucky.
78
79 *You mentioned teachers connecting and that really leads into question number three:*
80 *What opportunities do teachers have to collaborate or connect to impact teaching and*
81 *learning?*
82
83 Well, first of all you've built it into our schedule. I have an hour where my job is to hook
84 up with other teachers and students. So, I've been able to collaborate with Melissa in both
85 yearbook and art. A couple years ago, they did the sets for the Lorax and fourth grade,
86 fifth grade, so just so having that opportunity built-in, you know, I mean again it's kind of
87 that message from the top that this is something you value, and if you value it, you've

88 made place for it. You know, it's easy to give lip service, oh we want to collaborate, we
89 want to, you know, we want this community. We have these values, but if it's not, if
90 there's not a place made for that, then it's really hard and after a while it doesn't feel
91 genuine. So, you've really . . . I have my notes. And then Ahren, starting her initiative and
92 getting encouragement from not only you but from her and the book that we read, I can't
93 remember the title—the co-teaching book. So, it's kind of built into our structure, so that
94 makes a big difference. I think we also have people who are maybe not as afraid to
95 collaborate. You know, old-school teachers: You closed your classroom door and it was
96 your kingdom. You know, it was terrifying if anybody walked in. And I think that still
97 the norm with most big schools. See, you know, this is mine, don't mess with it. I've
98 worked out my little schedule and how I'm going to do it and don't bug me. and I don't
99 think that's true. So, we have to be a little more vulnerable here, and we have to be
100 willing to be a little uncomfortable sometimes. You know, that that kind of learning curve
101 the old Vygotsky, you know, I don't get it, I don't get it, I don't get it—oh, I get it! It's the
102 same thing we do with our students, so I think that's huge, and it takes a special teacher,
103 but I think it also takes that encouragement from the higher ups, which is you. It's the
104 intentionality. But back to two: the other thing its again that structure you know the
105 whole den time thing, you know, where PRIDE and digital citizenship and Katey coming
106 in with mindfulness and you know the intentional community-building, I miss first
107 period. I mean there's some nice things about just be strolling in late, but I do miss our
108 little I think I think we had we something was lost with [grades] 10 and 11 not having
109 that that morning community bonding thing because we have to work harder to get us to
110 get them on our side. So, there was something really nice about that, although you know,
111 it's always a trade-off. But I think, you know, so it's kind of like the proof is in the
112 pudding. The teachers actually practice all these things that we have to, and you give us
113 time in our meetings to talk about that, and if something comes up, you know, we have a
114 couple of truth tellers in our faculty, and you know and you're open to that even if it's not
115 something you always like to hear, you make room for that. You know, and that's that
116 makes a huge difference yeah, yeah.
117
118 *It's interesting, you talked a little bit about that uncomfortableness and vulnerability.*
119 *What do you think it is about this community that allows people to be uncomfortable?*
120
121 I think it's all about trust. And I think, you know, again part of its size, part of it's the way
122 you approach us, you know? I mean when you seem to genuinely care. I think most
123 people sense your genuine care. And that, you know, that makes you do…it's just like
124 with students, if they don't think you care about them, they're going to do with they want
125 to do. You know, yeah, they're smart, and I think you're a good listener and so it's a slow
126 process of building trust it's all about trust and confidence. You know, people want to

127 please other people if the sense that they're valued. And if they don't sense they're valued,
128 it's like, I'll do this for me, or why should I work so hard? I've been in both places.
129
130 *On that note, this is a quick bird walk. You talked about other places. Compare your*
131 *teacher community—good, bad or otherwise, with the teacher community here and create*
132 *some kind of a contrast.*
133
134 Okay, so my first job was at the junior high which is, you know, inner-city, huge poverty.
135 And I never, ever ate in the lunchroom. I sat in my classroom, and I didn't even know
136 where it was until like June. Nobody ever said, oh here's the classroom, nobody ever said
137 you have these 37 hours at the end of the year, you know, so there was no… It was a big
138 school and people were in kind of lockdown mode all the time. I got to know a couple of
139 the teachers, but not well, and it wasn't like we were a community. So, the head of the
140 English department kind of looked out for me, but beyond that, it was definitely not a, "I
141 want to get to know you," it was, "I need to help you." I was a teacher of concern right
142 from the beginning when I got there. So, you know, it's like this old lady comes in
143 because I was 47 when I got my when I start teaching a public school. I was, I was a little
144 overwhelmed, and so then when I went to the other junior high, which is my first
145 involuntary transfer, because that's when they changed to middle school or do you know
146 from junior highs to middle schools, just got here so we all had to leave. They closed us
147 down. That was a huge school. I got very close with my other seventh grade English
148 teachers so we were kind of like a triad and for one year we had planned together and it
149 was a wonderful thing because we planned together. I would come up with these huge,
150 impossible ideas and then they would break them down into some kind of
151 reasonable…okay, we can't do that, but we can do this. You know, and so we really
152 supported each other. And those are the only two people from that school that I'm still in
153 contact with. but as far as a broader, you know, so there was like there was a small group
154 of people who look out for each other, and I think that was because of one person who
155 made it her mission to make sure that people were welcomed and seen, but I never got it
156 from the other administration there and they didn't really know who I was. I just, I was.
157 And then the other high school, I was another involuntary transfer. When the new
158 principal came in, oh no, the new principal came in to the junior high and she must've had
159 a list of who she was supposed to get rid of because she started hounding from day one.
160 two of the teachers who were struggling. Rather than trying to help them she just drove
161 them out. One died, the other left teaching all together. And he had been successful, I
162 think he was probably on the spectrum, so he was doing computer classes and he was
163 doing well, but she came in and he had a social studies degree so having not touched
164 social studies for 20 years, she just changed the schedule and, I think, and it felt
165 intentional like, we know we have to get rid of you, so rather than supporting him in any
166 way, she just. . . so that was very sad. She never asked us what worked well at our school,

167 you know, so that was it. It was her, that's her style, you know. She has an agenda, and I
168 wouldn't be still teaching if I had to stay there. Then I got bumped to the high school the
169 day of the strike. So, I didn't get to strike with my buddies, I had to strike with brand new
170 people so that was interesting. I got to know some people. I think it was fine and I got to
171 know the principal, and I got to know the assistant principal, but again it was a huge
172 school, and my schedule was changed like, one week I was teaching 11th grade, and then
173 you know the numbers come through so then all of a sudden my schedule was changed
174 like the second week. You're no longer teaching this your teaching this. So, who is yeah
175 and just the size of it. So, when I had an opportunity to go back to middle school. I took it
176 and then, lucky, lucky, lucky! I got here, right? I think it's the size, it's the style of the
177 administrator. Whether not they really want to get to know the teachers, or they see
178 leading as, "I tell you what to do." Kind of like that PLC thing, right? You know, that the
179 teachers at both the middle school and high school resisted PLCs all the way through, so
180 it was like, okay, we have to get together, but we're doing it under duress and we're going
181 to do as little as possible. Where we kind of have natural PLCs. They happen naturally
182 and luckily Katey is a good secretary so she just kind of writes down what we say but
183 without her, I don't know if it would ever been recorded, maybe Jose. You know, we
184 have PLCs every day, because I work with Melissa on a regular basis, I connect with
185 Shae with middle school. What are you doing, what are we doing, how can we support
186 each other? I work with Jose, you know, and of course, Katey, so we're doing it all day
187 long. And then now that I'm in the elementary which is fun, that's kind of cool making
188 connections so they happen but it's a real organic thing. It's not, you have to do this. It's
189 not manufactured.
190
191 *So, as I am thinking about your perspective in secondary and elementary, describe the*
192 *skills that comprise the teaching ability in our school.*
193
194 I think we're open to new ideas, we're willing to keep learning, we're willing to try new
195 things, it's not hard for us. If we're too fixed, we kind of crash and burn. Sometimes it's
196 not easy, but I think it goes back to trust that we trust each other, and we know each other
197 well enough to know we're all kind of weird, and we all have our idiosyncrasies. We have
198 the things we are really good at and things were not good at. You know, technology and I
199 do not get along at all so I go to Jose or Katey or somebody else. I help out with NHD
200 you know, I'm the English teacher so I can help with that, you know collaborating with
201 journalism when they had to write profiles of, you know, Melissa said, "I don't know how
202 to teach this. I know this is really important," and so we collaborate for it was like five
203 weeks, I think. We did that work together and so I got to know them, and then some of
204 them came into drama, and then when she needs, you know, yearbooks not done yet, so
205 we have small classes for that, so she borrows her journalism students back who are in
206 my class, so we will let you know, it's that trust, I think so we have the skills, we just

207 know that we count on each other, and we we're very, I think we're tolerant of each
208 other's shortcomings, you know because we all have them.
209
210 *What does that tolerance look like?*
211
212 I think there's a lack of judgment, you know, I mean it would be really easy to let things
213 happen all the time and we do things well and we do things not so well, and I think we're
214 just kind to each other, and so we bring out the best in each other. And we try to play to
215 our strengths and throw the ball to somebody who has strengths that we don't have. You
216 know, like we really depend on Jazz for all kinds of things you know and she seems to
217 thrive there, you know, I will I'm worried sometimes we're going to wear her out, but you
218 know, she has certain, I don't know, she has an energy that you can't be matched for one
219 thing. She's a truth teller, she's you know, and she'll make things work, and she cares and,
220 you know, her caring is very easy to climb onto.
221 I mean if she's a leader in school and since she cares and she's her committed to this place
222 is so deep that it really encourages other people to say, okay, I follow you. So, you know,
223 again it's whoever the qualities of the leader really kind of set the tone. At my other
224 schools, you know, the only complaining sessions I ever have is when I go to the district
225 meetings. You know, but that was the norm when I worked at both middle school and
226 high school when we had our PLCs, most of the time was spent complaining about
227 students, complaining about what we had to do, and that just isn't true here. And every
228 once in a while, we get frustrated, but really, we're trying to help each other work things
229 out. So, we value each other and again that's because we are small enough group to get to
230 know each other. It comes back to that small school.
231
232 *So, this last question which maybe should've been the first question, is what motivates*
233 *teachers in our school?*
234
235 Well, I think the same thing that motivates students. We're seen, we're valued and it's the
236 relationships, you know, you foster relationships with staff, relationships between each
237 other, and that you know that makes all the difference. If there's no relationship, then
238 there's no reason to really commit and to give your best self, right? So, you know, it goes
239 back to that one that you know. . . I was struck dumb when you complimented me
240 because it never happened, you know? In all those years, and so it's true, I probably
241 became a better teacher coming here, because I responded to the small school and to the
242 warmth and to the genuine feelings here, and maybe it was having that ultimate
243 responsibility, you know, being the only drama teacher, the only creative writing teacher,
244 the only English teacher. I had to figure it out, you know, but I had, it felt like I had the
245 support to do that, you know? That's the thing we need with our kids, that five-to-one. If,
246 you know, if you going to criticize, you've got to really push up the compliments, and the

247 encouragement. So, I think it's the structure of this school makes it helps that to be
248 happening the other thing I think you know they say that elementary teachers are like
249 elementary students, and middle schools are like middle school students, and high school
250 teachers are like. . . I think high school teachers get this kind of holier-than-though,
251 we're-all-that kind of thing because we have this expertise and we're having to work with
252 everybody from all the different levels. I have such a respect for elementary teachers
253 having spent time in the elementary teachers' classes, plus they don't get breaks, you
254 know. Technically, they can cobble together a kind of a break, but they don't, you know,
255 and they're responsible for more kids than we are, you know. So, I'll just all these
256 complaints from English teachers, all these papers I have to read, and blah blah blah.
257 There's really a class system, so I think that's another thing that's able to be broken down
258 here when you have elementary and secondary you know, so I know you know so my
259 students who are juniors now I've had for six years that is, so Eliza and Sabrina, they
260 were in my seventh grade class, and now they're the 11th graders you know so by the
261 time they graduate all of known them for seven years, and that you know, that makes a
262 real difference. And the same thing with it, one of the reasons I never got here until I was
263 moved here was because teachers won't leave, you know. They're happy to be here and
264 that in itself says something you know. If you, if you're happy to be here then you're not
265 going to want to leave. I would be retired now. My plan was to retire, and more aches and
266 pains, but these are my peeps, kind of, you know, and this is a good, this snow week, was
267 a really good practice for if I retired. I tried to write, I wrote a little bit every day. I wrote
268 I have one day when I wrote most of the day, but you know, I guess I could become a
269 slug so quickly, so easily. So, I need to know, so I need that to keep going. I mean I still
270 have to figure out the balance, but I'm not ready. I'm not ready to leave, and I'm sure if I
271 had been at any of the other schools, I would have retired as soon as I could. I just feel so
272 there's some other English teacher waiting in the wings, but for now. I think it goes back
273 to the two big things: it's a small school and you as an administrator are a good listener
274 and supportive. It does. The messages from the top make a huge difference, you know,
275 those are important things.
276
277 *Nichelle, thank you. I really appreciate your time and your perspective. It was hugely*
278 *beneficial.*
279
280 Okay, thank you.
281

Teacher 3 [Pseudo name Preston]; Male; 34 years; 6 years of experience; 1 year at this
school; elementary teacher
2/13/19; 6:00pm; Interviewed by Stephanie Knipp

1 *SK: To start, can you state your name and acknowledge that you are being recorded.*

2

3   My name is [Preston] and I acknowledge that I am being recorded.

4

5   *Thanks so much for taking my phone call. First of all, I appreciate you being willing to*
6   *do this interview, especially on your own time when it's family time. I think we'll take*
7   *maybe 20 minutes, give or take. I'll be transcribing it, and I'll give you a copy of the*
8   *transcription just so you can look it over and say yeah, that is what I meant, or if I missed*
9   *anything you can certainly change that. So, there are five questions, and I sent these to*
10   *you via email, but you didn't have to do anything to prep for them, and there's no right or*
11   *wrong answers, so I'll go ahead and just get started with the first question. Describe the*
12   *sense of community at our school, and for this purpose, sense of community is defined as*
13   *a feeling that members have of belonging and being important to each other and a shared*
14   *faith that members needs will be met by the commitment to be together. Describe that*
15   *sense of teacher community at our school.*

16

17   From the perspective of a new teacher is I have felt very welcomed, and I'm included in
18   collaboration and discussions but also just feeling like in the staff room at lunches, not
19   feeling excluded but feeling like part of the group and so I feel like interpersonally and
20   professionally, I guess there's a real sense of community among teachers and staff, and I
21   think that I haven't been at a school that has had the most cohesion from where I just feel
22   welcome from the front office and the teachers and then in the secondary level so yeah,
23   so that that's how I feel the sense of community is very high as far as feeling like
24   members needs are met, I've never had a need that I felt like I couldn't ask someone and
25   have it be dealt with.

26

27   *Talk to little bit about feeling of being included. What are some of the ways that teachers*
28   *made you feel included?*

29

30   Even just asking questions about me and on taking an interest in me. Where do I come
31   from, and just feeling like teachers are interested in me, and maybe I have something to
32   offer. I am just valued, I think in some places when someone is new relationships are
33   more solidified in their interactions and it is a little harder to break that barrier. So, I have
34   never felt that here. I've always felt at our school that my opinions matter and I am an
35   equal member of collaboration.

36

37   *So, I can kind of move this into question two. How would you say the teacher culture is*
38   *shaped at our school? Culture includes norms and values and beliefs.*

39

40   I think that values like important values would be like making sure that everyone's
41   opinions are heard/ I'm thinking about our elementary team collaborations and it's very

42   much a level playing field. I don't feel like there's any voices that drown each other out.
43   We are actually interested in what we can learn from each other, so I think that that is a
44   value, too, seeing what we can learn from each other and how we can all become better
45   because of what we can learn from our peers.
46
47   *All right, that kind of ties into question number three. What opportunities do teachers*
48   *have to collaborate to impact teaching and learning?*
49
50   The elementary team has been able to collaborate across grade levels and that's been
51   beneficial because we've able to hear about fourth grade and what's going on in fourth
52   grade, and I've been able to share what we're doing in third grade, and I think it's helpful
53   to know where the students are going to next and to frame our instruction with that
54   mindset, too. But then our weekly staff meetings too, I feel like there's been opportunities
55   to learn from our teachers at the secondary level, too, and that is something that I have
56   never experienced before being able to interact so closely with people from secondary so
57   that's been a very cool opportunity for me, to be able to get their insight, too.
58
59   *I think that you brought up a good point about secondary and elementary collaboration.*
60   *It's kind of unique to our school. This is really more of a follow-up question: How do you*
61   *think that secondary and elementary collaboration, being all on one campus, how does*
62   *that impact our sense of teacher community?*
63
64   I think that. . . I think that it's a stronger sense of community then when they're on
65   separate campuses because I'm able to see I guess there's a shared commitment to the
66   same students and so students that are able to go to school through elementary and then
67   into secondary, there's teachers across all those grade level bands that are invested in the
68   same students, and I think that it is very unique because it's not like we forget about them
69   once they leave our classroom, especially like a school like our school, it's so small we
70   see students after year, I can see how having been able to see them into secondary, I think
71   there's a bigger history with the students to draw from, which secondary can talk with
72   elementary about what worked and what successes they had with those particular students
73   and in elementary can keep in contact with students they have had. I think that both of
74   those are very valuable to being on the same campus.
75
76   *So just a couple more questions. Describe the skills that comprise the teaching ability in*
77   *our school.*
78
79   I think that I have really enjoyed seeing all the creativity that the teachers have for skill-
80   wise I'd say that it's a very creative staff that teachers think out of the box and look at
81   creative ways to impact their students. Collaboration I say that is very important, because

82   there's only one class per grade. I feel like there's as much collaboration as I've had in
83   previous schools, but I feel like it's more intentional because we are working across grade
84   level bands. l like, yeah, I said there's the collaboration, the creativity those skills those
85   two come to mind
86   .
87   *So, in light of what we've talked about, what motivates teachers in our school?*
88
89   There is a steely-eyed focus, I guess, on student success and everything else is kind of
90   framed around that and student engagement, and students enjoy being at school. I've seen
91   a lot of creative things teachers are doing and I think that's from their motivation, they
92   want to get the kids to succeed. I think that's a big motivation that I'm noticing is student
93   success.
94
95   *Is there anything else that you're kind of thinking about our teacher sense of community*
96   *in our school that I haven't asked you about?*
97
98   I guess just reiterate you asked how I felt included.
99
100   *Preston, and that's the end of my formal questions, and I just want to thank you for taking*
101   *time to answer my questions. I am I'll be using this information, along with several other*
102   *teachers who are interviewing with me, to compile and put together a perspective on*
103   *what ways that we can support teachers and teacher communities. Take care and enjoy*
104   *the rest of your evening.*
105

Teacher 4 [Pseudo name Neale]; Male; 36 years; 8 years of experience; 3 years at this
school; elementary teacher
2/8/19; 12:30pm; Interviewed by Stephanie Knipp

1   *SK: To start, can you state your name and acknowledge that you are being recorded.*
2
3   My name is [Neale] and I acknowledge that I am being recorded.
4
5   *Thanks so much for participating in this interview today. I really appreciate you, and I*
6   *would just like to ask five questions, and I may ask you some follow-up questions or*
7   *clarifying questions along the way. I anticipate this will take about 20 minutes or so, but*
8   *if we need more time or less that's fine, and I'll provide a copy of the transcript to you so*
9   *that you have a chance to look at it. We will just use this phone as our microphone of*
10   *sorts so I'll give it to you, and you can hold onto it unless I ask for it back, all right?*
11   *Describe the sense of community at our school. For this purpose, sense of community is*

12 *defined as that feeling that members have a belonging and been important to each other*
13 *and shared faith that members needs will be met by the commitment to be together. So,*
14 *could you describe community at our school?*
15
16 I think probably the first thing that I see when I think of community at our school is the
17 idea of equality and that we all play our own roles, but yet our roles are connected, and
18 we truly have to trust each other. I think there is that trust in the school where if I do my
19 job and prepare students for you, I can trust you're going to do your job and help them
20 succeed beyond that. I also think at our school there's a base of positivity rather than
21 focusing on negatives and struggles. While we do try to address student struggles, I think
22 we try to celebrate a lot more of the positive that we do.
23
24 *So, you talked about equality of roles. Can you tell me just a little bit more about what*
25 *you mean by that?*
26
27 As far as equality of roles, I guess in this school what I see is the teachers are more
28 niched rather than having three English teachers, three math teachers, three of everything
29 where there's this sort of someone in charge of each aspect of the school and supportive
30 of doing their job because we see students as more of a giant puzzle in and we all have to
31 do our piece to support them and put their picture together.
32
33 *I like that giant puzzle idea. Let's move to that next question: How is the culture shaped*
34 *in our school? School culture includes the norms, values and beliefs. So how do you see*
35 *how the culture is shaped?*
36
37 I think the culture is initially shaped by is having a common goal, and I see in this school,
38 I don't know these are official common goal, but it feels like we're all here to support
39 students as humans and prepare them for life rather than just learning random things and
40 passing tests and moving to the next level seems to be a true buy-in to what's best for
41 students. I think a lot of that comes from having students that want to be here and
42 whether or not they enjoy being at school for say, or just being a part of a group of kids
43 who want school to be an okay place, a safe place, I also see there's a lot of flexibility
44 with what students want to learn and how we how we meet their needs. As far as learning
45 is an action not as a concrete thing they get, they walk away with.
46
47 *So, we were talking about culture. . . how would you say that teachers are instrumental in*
48 *shaping culture for students and for staff?*
49
50 I think it starts at the beginning with a shared expectation, and that's what where kids
51 build a culture is what we expected them how they talk to each other, how they work with

52 each other, how they even think as students. I see that as their culture. They embrace each
53 other or they have to figure out how to work with each other even if they don't like each
54 other. So, some of that comes from rules or you know common goals like at our class or
55 school…what is it called? PBL is that it? That's not right.
56
57 *Like our PLCs?*
58
59 PLCs, or that's not what I was thinking of. The positive…
60
61 *Oh, like PBIS?*
62
63   Yeah, PBIS so we have that pride in school pride in and having really clear, solid,
64 foundational words where students know what we expect and that we're all striving to be
65 better people in these five ways, and it helps with the culture. At that point it becomes
66 down to the follow-through in and truly supporting. I don't think students can become a
67 culture or accept others around their cultures until they feel accepted. I feel like here,
68 students individually feel accepted first and then there are more willing to accept others.
69
70 *Yes, all right, so question three: What opportunities do teachers have to collaborate to*
71 *impact teaching and learning? And just to collaborate, it doesn't have to be specific to*
72 *that. What opportunities do you see?*
73
74 So as professionals, I think there's always the opportunity to ask each other for advice,
75 suggestions, or even just bouncing ideas off people, I think it comes down to
76 communication. Teachers wanting to be open, wanting to strive to be better, not just to be
77 happy with good enough, but there are the PLCs and the times where we collaboratively
78 get together as a staff and will work on just general teaching skills and ways to look at
79 kids, and help kids, support them. I think one of the biggest difference makers is when we
80 do work together, physically together, and when it comes to like you, so what is it called,
81 when students are being tracked by multiple teachers [flag team] rather than just having
82 one teacher to be connected to. I am, guys, I think that just helps because the next time
83 we talk we have something to talk about that support students rather than just, "what a
84 day—oh, I'm tired!" I think it's also having opportunities, at least at the elementary level,
85 but as we try to encourage going into each other's classrooms and sharing what the
86 students are working on and even having students work with other students across grade
87 levels in classrooms. Because in order to do that you have to collaborate with the
88 teachers, and that pushes, changes, the way you see what you're teaching and kind of, I
89 think it only helps the comparing ability to me comes down to being open-minded. I think
90 we're all guilty of coming in and hearing someone's thought and thinking yours is better,
91 but true collaboration is the idea that maybe I'm wrong, but this is what I've been doing,

92   and what have you been doing? And then throwing I think we all have such different
93   backgrounds as far as how we got here as teachers especially here. A lot of the teachers
94   come from different places and experiences so it helps us I think, not to think about it
95   through the I went to elementary, I have my four year teaching degree, but everyone has a
96   different version of getting that, that helps because our kids are over going to the same
97   place so I guess I think we need to collaborate as we all different pasts and we all are able
98   to see kids in different lights I think that way.
99
100   *So, describe some of the skills that comprise the teaching ability in our school.*
101
102   That's a loaded question. Skills that comprise the teaching ability in our school. I hate to
103   go to knowledge first but for us it's hard to teach something you're not knowledgeable of.
104   I don't think you need to be Stephen Hawking or an expert on the subject, but you need to
105   know what the end result is going to be. And then secondarily, probably more important
106   comes to me the idea that we're teaching how we are supposed to learn, how you're
107   supposed to challenge the way you think. I see a lot of teachers especially at the school
108   who really embrace that. I mean, realistically, we don't need to memorize who found the
109   Pacific Ocean first. But we learn how to research and ask questions and challenge the
110   way we view the world. I think that's embraced here and the skills, you know, most
111   people get into teaching were successful in school, so they've seen what it takes to be
112   successful. I think being a good teacher comes down to helping the kids that don't think
113   that way. In reality, there are a ton of kids you probably would be fine with anyone as
114   their teacher, but we're here to help those kids he wouldn't be otherwise. It makes for a
115   successful place for them. Do you think that's what the rest of the staff would think about
116   that idea? That all depends who's hearing my answer. There I don't know, I have a hard
117   time speaking for anyone in secondary, I just have no experience. They take on such
118   heady concepts, it is hard for me to even…the things we ask is to learn. Personally, I
119   think we're going way too wide and not deep enough so the things we do in high school
120   now, I have a hard time personally seeing the relevance of life for most kids, the
121   majority, so remind me of the question?
122
123   *Describe the skills that comprise the teaching ability in our school.*
124
125   So, we were I guess we were talking about the idea that students who struggle through
126   school. How does your teacher see that is kind of the main goal? I think most elementary
127   teachers do because from my experience even if were complaining, or like pulling our
128   hair out, it's because we love these kids and want them to truly have it. I definitely
129   believe secondary feels that way, it's a different version of it, because you're dealing with
130   near adults. It's when a 10-year-old makes a mistake it's vastly different from a 15-year-

131   old goofs up. So, I believe they're here for their best interest, but there is a little bit of
132   higher expectation for the older kids, which there should be.

133

134   *So, this is a question kind of combining ideas. When we're thinking about the main goal*
135   *of elementary and secondary and the fact that we are both on the same campus, how do*
136   *you think that contributes to our school culture?*

137

138   I think it's huge. Having a place where younger kids can see where they're going, visually
139   and physically see where they're going, because for most there is the end of one school
140   building, and they have no idea. I was on the other side of the door it's just fear and I
141   remember, most of us remember middle school and high school being scary transitions
142   because of the unknown. The comfort level for a kid when there is not an unknown, when
143   they've seen the teachers. They've seen the rooms, they've seen the other kids that
144   successfully walked across the same path as them. I think it's so comforting for kids and I
145   guess on the flipside for another student is there has to be a lot more faith in with their
146   parents say, what the teachers say, because their brothers and sisters are saying and then
147   you're hearing from primarily negative sources which can be scary.

148

149   *All right, so this is kind of the last question. What motivates teachers in our school?*

150

151   This school in general, I think what motivates is success. I think a lot of teachers, a lot
152   here specifically, love to see students succeed. That comes back to when we talked about
153   positive and celebrating students. So, there's' kind of an internal drive to help every
154   student succeed so we can celebrate all students which is awesome. I love that as far as
155   success, I think we're all very good at understanding what that means. It doesn't mean
156   every kid is passing, you know, UW classes, yet it means for them they've made it further
157   than they would have if they weren't at this school. They've done things they didn't think
158   they could do, or they'd never take it on. I think that's truly motivating for this group.
159   Especially we have some kind of personalities I think here where they love throwing
160   things that a kid that will scare them, and then coming back three months later and say,
161   you didn't think you could do this, which is really cool.

162

163   *And why do you think they do that?*

164

165   I think I kind of comes back to what we talked about with the idea that the unknown can
166   be scary, and some kids are more apt, or humans I guess, are apt to say things are
167   undoable. And if we can train them from a young age or help them see that even if you
168   don't succeed, you don't get it right, you can always try, and you'll get something out of
169   it. It's always worth trying because when it comes, I just me personally, it's hard to
170   understand other people's motives, I'd like to believe we're all here because we want kids

171   to have a good experience in education. I mean even if teachers tend to be people who
172   succeeded in school, I think we've all seen people who didn't, and wish they could've had
173   that. We tend to be people who care about people. We want the world to be a better place,
174   and I guess we can't change everyone's life so let's start with this--as many kids as we can
175   get in our rooms, and it's a lot harder to change an adult life then set a kid up to find the
176   right place for themselves.

177

178   *How do you see staff supporting each other as they get better?*

179

180   Here, I see a lot of them is very similar to the way we support kids, to be honest. We
181   celebrate each other a lot and did a lot of positive interaction as far as, you know, I
182   noticed what you guys are doing. That's so cool! Do you want to share that with my
183   students? I also think we're very good at supporting each other outside like our personal
184   lives as well which seems unimportant. I had a hard time in my life getting over myself to
185   that point yet where do you have to be bigger than yourself and care about people
186   because you can't teach if your life is falling apart. We think about with students, but not
187   always think about it with peers. I know for me—this kind of relates to everything. My
188   biggest change for me when I was young, I thought, just close the door and just be a great
189   teacher yourself. I worked so hard, but I realized I'm only helping 20 something students
190   when I started trying to help the entire school's problems or issues, I feel like I'm I am
191   doing more to help more people. I think they get that at this school, it's not every man for
192   themselves. But elementary tends to be a little more like that because we have students
193   the entire day and is like I am in charge of this kid, no one else is, where secondary you
194   can be a little more supportive as far as you have a sixth of the student.

195

196   *Do you think that's different at this school? I mean, these are my students versus another*
197   *school where you don't have a secondary on the campus?*

198

199   Having work at another school, I don't think it is, I think the advantage of the schools I've
200   been at outside of this is having the multiple teachers in the same grade level because
201   they know what you're going through and they tend to get to know the kids, the grade
202   band, where as being the only has six grade teacher, you at times it gets to the point
203   where I know people care about me and I want to support me but there not dealing with
204   the same animals at that time.

205

206   *I think I've run out of questions! Yeah, thank you, Neale. I think that that wraps up our*
207   *interview—I appreciate it.*

208

Teacher 5 [Pseudo name Tony]; Male; 60 years; 7 years of experience; 4 years at this
school; secondary teacher

2/18/19; 10:00am; Interviewed by Stephanie Knipp

1   *SK: To start, can you state your name and acknowledge that you are being recorded.*
2
3   My name is [Tony] and I acknowledge that I am being recorded.
4
5   *Thank you so much for your willingness to interview with me today. I'm truly grateful. So,*
6   *first question of five, and I anticipate that should take about 20 minutes, describe the*
7   *sense of teacher community at our school. And for this purpose, a sense of community is*
8   *defined as a feeling that members have a belonging, and being important to each other,*
9   *and a shared faith that members needs will be met by the commitment to be together. So,*
10 *coming back to that question: Describe the sense of teacher community at our school.*
11
12 Okay, well I would say it's strong, it's something that's hard to define, but you know it
13 when you feel it I'm looking at your definition of feeling that members have a belonging,
14 yes, and being important each other, yes, and a shared faith that members needs will be
15 met by the commitment to be together. Yes, now I'm trying to think of actual data points
16 for you. How does that happen? Well, it's subtle. I think some of it is probably the type of
17 people that we are and that has all a lot to do with the type of school we are. We know
18 going in, what's expected of us.
19
20 *What type of people are we?*
21
22 People people, in which teachers tend to be anyway, but even those of us that are more
23 that I would say stem-focused, also are people people rather than just, you know, the mad
24 scientist out there. I'm finding this is harder to speak than I thought it was gonna be. I'm
25 on that I'm on the so so let me a let me try to gather my feelings are in my thoughts here
26 let's see, um.
27
28 *I could take you on a bird walk if you like to.*
29
30 What does that mean?
31
32 *So that would be me asking: compare your previous school community to this community.*
33
34 Okay, our community here okay. I can do that. So, my experience before, as you know,
35 was with a comprehensive high school. I did not feel that feeling at all between
36 departments. As a matter of fact, it was a lot of competition, yes because there was a lot
37 of time crunches over there and every department saw every other department as being
38 the reason, but at the same token intended to make the departments tight. Now, there was
39 interdepartmental defections and by that, I mean, some of the English guys were friends

40 with the science guys and they would come over and chat so it wasn't like, you know
41 tribes, at least, right? But it was usually good natured, but not always, and but in the
42 department as we've mentioned, it was really tight. Not one hundred percent, it's not, like
43 you know, everything went like clockwork for sure. A lot of that was due to the norms in
44 routines of the department the physical layout of the department and I think also the fact
45 that a lot of people, especially at my level had to teach multiple classes, so we interacted,
46 a lot.
47
48 *How does that compare to here? Now describe your community here.*
49
50 The actual teaching part, here, is a whole lot more stressful here, having your own
51 classroom, especially in a science classroom. We are so much gear driven, stuff and
52 things, and you know setting an environment. I hate to use the word science-y, because I
53 just hate that, but I think you understand what I mean, and I think that really supports the
54 kids too, because their teachers are not discombobulated, they feel a little less
55 discombobulated. I really picked that up immediately when I was here. So, I think here,
56 there is only one other science person hear and that is Jazz, and we don't even cross that
57 much in our science tasks, and yet we work really well together. Part of that is because
58 naturally we are right next to each other so it's easy for us to communicate which I think
59 is important. Comparing that to classrooms, where we have to get out go to the hallway
60 walk down the hallway and go in. There's just a natural barrier there. And but even those
61 classrooms where I do have to leave and go, I always feel welcome, I never feel like I'm
62 intruding. We show respect for each other's classroom's when we enter as any teacher
63 would. I also feel like when I have a sub, my co-teachers immediately take them under
64 their wing. I don't have to ask like, I am going to have a sub. Can you watch out? They
65 just do it as I do it, you know? I check in with the sub. How are you doing? Is everything
66 going okay? blah blah blah Speaking as you know, anybody who subbed, they realize
67 how invaluable that is, and then also I don't know whether it's because were a small
68 school or it's the type of people we are, but it seems that way across the entire school,
69 even say with the elementary wing. Even though we don't see the elementary wing as
70 much—we don't lunch together; still, there just when we come together for meetings or
71 when we have to work together just seems to be a complete. I don't want to say,
72 willingness because willingness to sounds like it's an expectation that you're willing, to
73 you know, "sure, I'll do that" but it's more of a, "of course, I'll do that!" Yeah, it's not
74 even a question of whether I should or shouldn't, it's just of course. I don't even think it's
75 articulated in your brain, it's just something we do that is really helpful as well.
76
77 *That really folds well into the next question: so how is the teacher culture shaped in our*
78 *school, and school culture includes like norms, values, and beliefs.*
79

80   Well, I think a lot of it is shaped by you, and also, I again think that its shaped by the kind
81   of people. Perhaps all teachers would work this way if they had this type of, maybe,
82   expectation or culture coming in. Now we've always been pretty lucky at least since I've
83   been here that only one to the most three teachers come in a time. I remember when
84   Neale came in and he seem really uptight the first three or four weeks, and I would talk to
85   him and I would tell him, I know exactly what's going to your mind. And he said, what's
86   that? And I said when is the other shoe going to drop? And he's like, yeah, and I go it's
87   not. This is it. That it's not going to get worse than this. This is it. And he is like, really?
88   And he even came to me later some weeks later and said, wow! You're right, you know. I
89   was waiting for that stress level to rise and you know, it can't really be this good, but it is!
90   And it spoils you, some of the teachers of been here for a while even say they're not sure
91   they could go back to another school. We come to thrive in it, and it's nice to be, to look
92   forward to coming to your job to be around the people that you like working around. The
93   thing is, I've noticed that anytime there's even any stress at all, people know when to back
94   off because their coworker is more important than whatever it is that the stress was
95   causing. I saw this a lot during the election. People knew enough and cared enough about
96   each other to just leave it alone.
97
98   *Where does that care come from?*
99
100 That's a good question. I am, where does that come from? While I can't really speak for
101 everyone else, but for myself, I think it we like this so much that we're not willing to
102 damage it. And sometimes it's hard to explain especially as teachers we all have teacher's
103 disease, we like to talk, we like to you know, inform and instruct and learn. You know,
104 we like a good debate, but I think I know when you care enough about each other, you
105 know, it's kind of like family around the dinner table, you just know, we'll do this later.
106 Well you know, we're not going to solve the world, but you know, we are going to solve
107 the sandwich right here with everyone else.
108
109 *So, what opportunities do teachers have to collaborate to impact teaching and learning?*
110
111 Here at this school, in general? Well, a lot I mean there's both formal and informal and
112 the informal happens all the time. We talk, we share notes, we lunch together, which is
113 nice. I probably lunch together with everyone else the least. Apparently, that's a science
114 teacher's disease, and because sometimes I just want to be alone with my thoughts for a
115 little bit, and then sometimes I have kids in my classroom doing testing, or if it's a cold
116 day, I just let them in there and eat. But even so, I still feel like I have a lot of time
117 informally. I kind of make it a habit to check in with all the other teachers at least once a
118 week to stick my head in the classroom see what they're doing, what's new, what's
119 happening, and then also the lunches go on a big way. And we do so much informal work

120 at our lunches and that when we do formal work, it's not as awkward. It's not as
121 awkward— that is something that I hadn't thought of before. It's more collegial it's more,
122 man I'm having a hard time thinking of the word… I'll come back to it. So, I feel what
123 opportunities teachers have, well we've got Learning First. we collaborate someone with
124 there and that's more of a directed collaboration, I guess, right? But on the weeks that we
125 don't have you, we will spend, sometimes, not all the time, sometimes we have to it'll go
126 off on our own, but sometimes we will collaborate. what I find interesting is at this
127 school, I mean I will even collaborate with the PE teacher.
128
129 *Tell me about that.*
130
131 Well, I am especially when I get into the physics, is so much of the physics is math that I
132 try to take it as far away from math as possible so that people can, and by people I mean
133 students, can understand what it actually means and Dean, our PE teacher is really good
134 at that because he allows us to use the gym and he thinks of ways or helps in ways that
135 we can use body movement. He's even let me hang a huge pendulum in his gym. Yeah,
136 he's been very good about that and also, you know, doing things like motion with balls,
137 motion with weights, motion with the actual student weights, so they can actually feel the
138 difference, and the students have reported that this has been really helpful. And so you
139 know, I'm I really like the opportunity to do that wherein maybe a different school that
140 wouldn't just yeah, that wouldn't get much traction at all. Love to help, but no.
141
142 *So, describe the skills that comprise the teaching ability in our school. What do you what*
143 *do you see in terms of what the skills are.*
144
145 For me, or for just in general, or both?
146
147 *Yeah, big picture.*
148
149 I think the skill at least in the school, I don't know, if I would call it a skill, or a I suppose
150 it could be a skill, if you learned it, but it really a quality, there you go, is just a
151 commitment an internal commitment to not just the kids, but to each other, some of that
152 commitment I think you would be a skill because I've seen some of the newer teachers
153 come in and start to absorb. You know, because it's really hard your first few years, even
154 if you were a seasoned teacher being in a new school is always a change. And I can see
155 that. I can see that happen, I can see that support, I can see that the skill of being free to
156 ask for help, let them teach you, so I'm trying to think of things that would be different
157 about the school than any other school.
158

159 *Something you just said about feeling free to ask. Where is that coming from, tell me*
160 *more about that.*
161
162 Well, I think it comes from like collegiality, seeing that you know you are not going to
163 be, I had to use the term judged, yeah, I can't think of another term that works. Yeah, go
164 ahead and ask. We all have questions, you know, I can remember my first year here, I did
165 nothing but ask, and everybody was you know, yeah, sure no problem. We'll hook you
166 up, we'll fix you up. This is what we do, even including the office staff. I never felt like I
167 was, you know, because especially the office staff in a large school, they're extremely
168 busy, and sometimes they forget and treat you like, you know, you're really bothering me,
169 and I have important things to do. And, you know, I'm sure we've all been on the other
170 end of that or both end of that, but here, I really feel like, at least my first year, everybody
171 if you know, if they were busy would put down their pencil or look up from the
172 keyboard, and really give you their focus and full attention, and I never felt like I was
173 intruding, or even if I was intruding, that was okay, because you need to know this, it's
174 something that I guess it's hard to define at first blush. But maybe it will come to me as I
175 think about it some more. Skills.
176
177 *Maybe, something that we can move on from this idea of skills is to question five. Maybe*
178 *it is a bit more broad. What motivates teachers in our school?*
179
180 Oh, my goodness, yeah, that's interesting. Why this school and not another school? Yes,
181 well, it wouldn't be money because the money would be the same at whatever school you
182 went to. I think there is a little bit of, maybe because were a small school we tend to have
183 a little bit of a family feeling. I think that we recognize in a small school that you have to
184 bring more to the table than just your expertise as a teacher.
185
186 *Why is that?*
187
188 I think if you're if you're not a people person, I think if you're not comfortable being
189 collegial, I don't think it's going to work here very well. I've been at some schools
190 especially when I was subbing where teachers didn't want to be bothered by anybody or
191 anything. They wanted to blow into the classroom, do their job, grades some tests, and
192 run out to their car and leave. And the less time they spent anywhere else, the better. And
193 you know, maybe that works in that situation. But I could not see that working here.
194
195 *Why doesn't it work here?*
196
197 You know, that's a really good question. That's something that's hard to quantify. I
198 maybe the social message would be misunderstood, or I think because the small school,

199 like this you have to wear so many hats, you have to get along. And what's great is it you
200 don't have that feeling of I have to get along, you want to get along.
201
202 *And why is that?*
203
204 How that's a really good question I think I'm going to go back to my navy days. Here I
205 was on a very small shift when I started out: 200 crewmen. And parts of that ship we're
206 pretty tight because we had to be because it was a small ship that it times, we had to wear
207 many hats. And then my second job, and was on a much bigger ship, 800 crewmen, and
208 half of what she didn't even see. And you tend to get really tight with your little group,
209 and not tight with any other group. And you had a more us versus them mentality.
210 Resources. You are scrambling for resources, you're scrambling for time and the enemy
211 becomes the other rather than the bigger job.
212
213 *So how is that, how does that comparison hold true or not hold true at this school?*
214
215 Well, I think it's because we have to do so many different things and we have to do them
216 with each other, and we have to learn from each other. Not just take over a job well and
217 we not only have to learn that the technical end of the job but the social end of the job
218 too. Teaching science is not the same as teaching math. And teaching a math is not the
219 same as teaching English, and what's really interesting is being in a small school and
220 seeing how it's done it's interesting how different they really are taught. One thing that I
221 always fascinates me is to go in and watch Jazz teach, because she's so good at one on
222 one and she's so good at time management, and I don't use the word discipline, that's not
223 the word I'm using, expectations and her own follow through is incredible I don't want to
224 use the word disciplined because that sounds like a bad thing, but she is self-disciplined,
225 and so I learn a lot from that and learning from each other, I think, is really important.
226 That's where I think that legitimate peripheral participation comes in, right? Because you
227 know even though I learned the technical end of my job, and I don't really get much of
228 that from Jazz, the teaching end of it, I get enormous amounts from watching Jazz, even
229 watching Dean, watching Nichelle, because they all relate to their students differently,
230 but it all works. Oh, that other analogy. So, when I went to Navy the second time, I got
231 put in a small boat unit. There was six of us on a boat, and that was it. So, you had to
232 depend on each other. And it was it was strange because it wasn't collegial, it was serious.
233 I mean it, I guess you could say it's collegial, but I get but it's not exactly the same
234 because it is serious business. And so, yeah, that doesn't, you can drop that, I can't make
235 that metaphor work at all; I also think having a shared, something that just occurred to
236 me, a shared vision is probably really important to and I don't know if it would be easy to
237 articulate, but I think, you is the principal, you kind of have your vision of what you want
238 to school to be, and I think we pick up on that either through each other or directly from

239 you. And then there's all the little signs, the signage, the actual signage, the way it's
240 written, the way its presented, communicates an expectation or a feeling. I also think it
241 comes back to us from our kids.
242
243 *What do you mean by that?*
244
245 I have a lot of different relationships with my kids here than I did at my other school. Not
246 to say I didn't have some good relationships with my other school, I did, but interestingly
247 enough, the best relationships I had were either from kids I had had subbing in middle
248 school, and or believe it or not, my knuckleheads. Because I really worked hard on my
249 knuckleheads, and I learned through subbing that the harder the kid, the more important
250 the relationship.
251
252 *So, you said you had good relationships here with kids. So why do you think that is more*
253 *so here than maybe your previous experience?*
254
255 Well, I think just like I don't have to exercise power as much, you know. It's always there,
256 of course, but if you think about it, it isn't, I think, because we're a choice school and
257 they realize if they goof off, they'll get kicked out. I don't think that even occurs to them.
258 I think it's more of the fact that because they see how we relate to each other, they feel
259 how we relate to them, they realize none of it's personal, as much as well it is personal,
260 it's personal in that we care about their education, we care about the environment. We
261 want it to be the best possible environment. It also it gives us a chance to I think being
262 more open and honest about who we are. I feel much more comfortable sharing me with
263 the students than I would at the big comprehensive. I felt like the least they knew about
264 me, the better. Where is here, you know I mean of course, you can run off at the mouth
265 and tell them more than they need to know, right, but a little personal information or
266 anecdotes goes a long way to letting the kids feel why this is important to you. I had to
267 say when I was a student it never even occurred to me why teachers taught. They were
268 just furniture like anything else, talking furniture. But how many ran out into the
269 mountain town it was the most awkward thing on planet earth because, why aren't you at
270 school? Whereas, I have run into a lot of students here and they will come up to me and
271 say hi.
272
273 *Why do you think that is?*
274
275 It's not awkward. Because the relationship is different it's like a lot of them invite me to
276 come watch their games or their plays, or whatever, because you know it isn't like I don't
277 think so much is the authority figure as much as they're trying to share some of their life.
278 Some of this is kind of hard to articulate.

279

280 *Tony, this is, this is great, and the conversations been really rich, and you responded to*
281 *the questions. And if later you're thinking, I would've added this, you're more than*
282 *welcome to send me a text or something like that. This has been really, really helpful.*
283 *Thank you so much.*

Teacher 1 [Pseudo name Deborah]; Female; 59 years; 22 years of experience; 15 years at this school; certificated support staff
Teacher 2 [Pseudo name Nichelle]; Female; 65 years; 19 years of experience; 7 years at this school; secondary teacher
Teacher 3 [Pseudo name Preston]; Male; 34 years; 6 years of experience; 1 year at this school; elementary teacher
Teacher 4 [Pseudo name Neale]; Male; 36 years; 8 years of experience; 3 years at this school; elementary teacher
2/25/19; 3:20pm; Group interviewed by Stephanie Knipp

Thank you so much for participating in this group interview, and I'd like to ask your permission to record you, so I'm going to pass you the phone and if you could just state your name and that yes, I have permission to record you.

Deborah, yes you have permission to record me. Neale, yes, you have permission to record me. Preston, yes, you have permission to record. Nichelle, yes, you have permission to record me.

All right, now that we have that out-of-the-way, the first question that we're going to talk about is a group conversation: How has this community affected your practice, or the practice of others? So how is this community, our teacher community, affected your practice or the practice of others? Any thoughts on that?

Nichelle: I don't think I became a good teacher until I came here, and I think part of it was that this is a place where you can really be yourself. So I worked really hard at my other schools, but I was never, I never felt like I could be totally myself. So, part of that was getting old, but I think there is something about the students who risk things that you don't see when you're in at a school with 164 students. And so I think part of it just comes from that, and you know it's messages from the top, and it's school on a human scale. I think the numbers of students that we have when you have a smaller school. And you have, not necessarily smaller classes, but a smaller class load over all. It makes a total, it makes a total difference. So I am a different person having worked here. I know, I know that.

Preston: Yeah, to piggyback on that, I think the sense of autonomy that I feel like we have here is very obvious, and I think there's an aspect to have trust in ourselves, but also in the community that we're all working towards the same goal. And we're all professionals, and I feel like that I trust the elementary team to carry on. And as my third-graders go on into other grades, I feel like that trust is reciprocated, that we are all, yeah, working toward a singular. I feel like that's not a given in schools. That do you have the same level of trust that um I think for me.

Neale: For me, this being my second school, I really got the advantage of getting new points of view. When you teach so long at one place, and then you see that, oh, there's some things you do habitually without thinking about is that the right thing to do as a teacher. And secondly, getting points of view from a wider range of levels and expertise rather than just having everyone with an elementary focus on training as well. And on top of that, I think there is a sort of freedom to individualize things because it's not me supporting a team of three people that have to be lockstep. And there's trust, like you said, Preston, said trust. When I can trust that the fifth grade, the teacher before me has

done well, and I can trust that whatever I do will be supported the next year, it's allows me to . . . I feel like I was so much for your to do what I believed as a teacher, it is at this location.

Deborah: For me, if there's one thing I've seen, it is a common thread that runs through the the whole school, not only with staff, but with students is the desire to see change. Most of our students come to us because they want to change. They were somewhere before they came here, and they felt like they needed something else. To be honest with you, many of the staff wanted more autonomy, they wanted more creativity, they wanted to be able to personalize, so they're coming here for change as well. and for me that makes me trust them at a high-level because I know that what they're doing is to support change and growth, and I worked at a lot of places and that's not a common thread that I have seen. So, for my practice it helps me to be in trustful and to know that I can look around and see with many other people are doing to do change and coach others to do the same.

All right, so in light of some of the points you have just brought up on everything from that idea of autonomy, trust, maybe being creative, and also being yourself, as we think about those things, how can school or district leadership support this community? Maybe in some of those aspects, or other ways, but just thinking about how a district and school leadership can support this community.

Neale: I've always, I've always felt that the district, in particular, could be more visible and present physically. I think in a school, it's a difficult and one that is sort of a little hidden choice school, it's not about the first place they would stop by, and its smaller, too, so I feel like when you work really hard and your passion about kids you want people to see that and I think the teachers here would love to be recognized more in a present way, not just to get awards, or a piece of paper, or email, and I've always felt like schools could do a better job of connecting buildings across buildings, you know, whether it's a sixth grade teacher meeting with seventh grade teachers before they let kids go, or it's just multiple high schools talking about where they see success, I think that we could start to have more of an identity as a district rather than just building, building, building, building.

Nichelle: I think the opportunities to collaborate with other grade levels and other teachers and you've done you know we've we've had some really really wonderful opportunities, and we can do that, but I think I am I think that something [intercom interruption] I forgot to say, oh, collaboration, yeah, I've had to to somehow provide that as a as a an ordinary thing rather than a super special thing. I mean we are a special place and we have those opportunities, but not a lot of schools have that where that's

encouraged and it it's not just it can't be just encouraged it has to be built into the system you have to provide those opportunities in a real way so that it it doesn't feel like it's just lip service. Yeah, it's really good you guys working together, but but to provide those real opportunities in the schedule.

Preston: I think given the nature of the school and the fact that so many of the kids are here for so many years that continuing to implement co-teaching strategies intentionally and um working, I think you'd be cool for like elementary teachers be able to work with their kids, like the kids they've had previous years, as they move up and also it's a really good opportunity for secondary teachers to be able to see who is kind of in the pipeline. I think that a lot of relationships can be formed and continued given the structure of the school.

Deborah: So, piggybacking on the co-teaching, the reason that it is working is that the leadership has planned in actual time for people to be able to do that, because everybody likes to support each other, but having actual time blocked out to do it within your day is really important. Having time blocked out for some people to do a higher level of intervention with other students, so that the teachers have a little extra support, um, with that is is essential as well, not easy to do with the small staff, but something that's possible. So that's my comment coming off of yours. In a different direction is that I think leadership letting people's passion sometimes dictate who gets assigned to what tasks of work somewhat things is very important. I've been in buildings where there are certain people that always get to do everything. And I think that having somebody in leadership that can pair with people's passions so that everybody gets to get excited about something, but also everybody feels valued for their different qualities is something that's incredibly important.

 Nichelle: Yet to kind of go off of that, I think it's so important that you know us. I've been in buildings where did you know that I'm wondering if the principal even knows my name, and just say it's not something you can measure necessarily, but it something that is um I mean we want the same things our students want. We want to be seen, we want to be valued, kind of like what you're going on, and it's not just recognition. It's just, I see what you're doing, and I acknowledge that, and even if it's, you know, we do we need to work on this, just to have that kind of a personal connection, I think it's so important. And even in large schools, it makes a difference. If you don't feel, if you don't feel like you're seen, then you're the only engine and you need you need that that I am don't know the fuel from other people, I guess. and I think that some administrators could do more of.

Neale: That's way one of my struggles. I think in teaching as you start to see things that lose their authenticity, and some of it comes down to the bureaucracy of what we do, of

having to have to have x number of meetings for this long and provide notes. When I think back to my first started teaching, I had some such valuable meetings, because I chose to go meet with someone and strategize and plan, and I'm, I think here, we do a pretty good job of, because everyone is doing different things, we have we have real focus on when we're meeting what we're going to get out of it, but there still a little bit of that forced, we have to, and yeah, we make it valuable, but is it authentic when we haven't, are we doing the things we're passionate about. Are we doing the things we really wanted to get out of meetings?

Deborah: About the positive spin to what our culture is like, the principal does an excellent job of making sure that she does kudos and recognize what we're doing, but but also setting up things like in staff meetings, encouragements, what we call them, when you give people the positive comments, but encouraging the staff to give each other positive comments, because that just spins off of us feeling more positively about each other. I think before we start doing it, there's many times you might've thought of something positive, but did you actually get time to go over until the person. So positives, bringing out the positives from the staff about each other is a really good thing.

Neale: I think that also connects to something I remember Preston saying when we first started school this year which is, so many places we've been there's teachers who focus on the negative the kids that have struggles. And yes, its human nature to vent, but I really I'd like to be better personally on staying on the positive, how much we love teaching, how much we love working with kids. And when you do something like that, it kind of feeds into what we're going to do in our classrooms or how we talk about school, so I like the positivity.