

2022

Principal Professional Learning: Exploring Personal and Contextual Barriers and Facilitators of Change

Jennifer M. Shepard
University of North Florida, JENIE@ZOOMEMAIL.COM

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unf.edu/etd>



Part of the [Educational Leadership Commons](#)

Suggested Citation

Shepard, Jennifer M., "Principal Professional Learning: Exploring Personal and Contextual Barriers and Facilitators of Change" (2022). *UNF Graduate Theses and Dissertations*. 1150.
<https://digitalcommons.unf.edu/etd/1150>

This Doctoral Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship at UNF Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in UNF Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of UNF Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [Digital Projects](#).
© 2022 All Rights Reserved

Principal Professional Learning: Exploring Personal and Contextual Barriers and Facilitators of
Change

by

Jennifer Maynard Shepard

A Dissertation submitted to the Department of Leadership,

School Counseling & Sport Management

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH FLORIDA

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES

October, 2022

Unpublished work © Jennifer Maynard Shepard

This proposal titled Principal Professional Learning: Exploring Individual and Contextual Barriers and Facilitators for Change

Dr. Diane Yendol-Hoppey, Committee Chair

Dr. Rebecca West Burns, Committee Member 1

Dr. David Hoppey, Committee Member 2

Dr. Melanie Sanders, Committee Member 3

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my daughter, Anna.

You are my inspiration and my greatest gift. I love you!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This journey would not have been possible without the ongoing support and encouragement of so many. I would like to start by extending sincere appreciation to my dissertation committee for their guidance and for continuously stretching my thinking. To Dr. Rebecca West Burns, I thank you for your partnership. To Dr. David Hoppey, I am grateful for your advice and feedback throughout my entire doctoral journey. To Dr. Melanie Sanders, thank you for being a positive role model and mentor. It was your example that proved this was possible and kept me motivated to make it happen. To my committee chair, Dr. Diane Yendol-Hoppey, I offer heartfelt gratitude for igniting my curiosity and guiding me to think more deeply about the relationship between professional learning and change. You have been there for me every step of the way, and I thank you for believing in me!

I would also like to thank my cohort, the “Divine 29”. Your friendship and support has made this doctoral adventure something special. I learned so much through our dialogue over the years.

Most importantly, none of this would have been possible without the support of my family. My parents, Tom and Lynn Maynard, instilled a love of learning from an early age and taught me to reach for the stars. Mom & Dad, I am who I am today because of your constant support and unconditional love. To my sister, Jessica, thank you for being my cheerleader. To my husband, Joey, I thank you for encouraging me to go for it when I showed interest in pursuing another degree. You have always supported me, even if it meant more work for you, and for that, I will be forever grateful. Finally, to my daughter, Anna, I thank you for always understanding when I had to work. My only hesitation to pursuing my doctorate degree was that

you would be starting high school at the same time; however, your independence and self-confidence has shown I made the right decision. I will always cherish the time we worked on research projects simultaneously and shared the APA manual. Now that I'm finishing my college journey, yours is about to begin, and I am excited to see what your future holds!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Dedication.....	3
Acknowledgments.....	4
List of Tables and Figures.....	10
Abstract.....	12
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	14
Problem Statement.....	15
Purpose Statement.....	16
Research Questions.....	16
Overview of Theoretical Framework.....	17
Overview of Methodology.....	19
Significance of the Research.....	19
Organization of the Study.....	20
Chapter Summary.....	20
Chapter 2: Review of Literature.....	22
Part 1: Principal Professional Learning.....	24
Part 2: A Context of Change.....	36
<i>Personal Change</i>	38
<i>Organizational Change</i>	41
Part 3: Theory of Action.....	44
Part 4: Change in a Professional Learning Context.....	51
<i>Innovation</i>	56
<i>Learning Environment</i>	65
<i>Change Facilitator</i>	70
<i>Learning Agent</i>	73
<i>Interactions among the Key Players</i>	78
Chapter Summary.....	81
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	82
Research Questions.....	82

Research Design	83
Participant Selection	87
Data Collection	89
Data Analysis	98
Rigor	102
Confidentiality and Ethical Concerns	104
Researcher Positionality	105
Chapter 4: Individual Case Results	107
Principal Arthur	109
<i>Context</i>	109
<i>Change</i>	110
<i>Barriers</i>	117
<i>Facilitators</i>	118
Principal Holbrock	120
<i>Context</i>	120
<i>Change</i>	121
<i>Barriers</i>	126
<i>Facilitators</i>	128
Principal Matthews	133
<i>Context</i>	133
<i>Change</i>	135
<i>Barriers</i>	140
<i>Facilitators</i>	144
Principal Oliver	146
<i>Context</i>	147
<i>Change</i>	148
<i>Barriers</i>	157
<i>Facilitators</i>	158
Conclusion	163
Chapter 5: Integrated Case Results	165
Across Case Experiences with Innovation	167

Across Case Experiences with the Learning Environment.....	169
Across Case Experiences with the Change Facilitators.....	172
Across Case Experiences as a Learning Agent.....	174
Critical Connection Points between Professional Learning and Change	178
<i>Collective Leadership</i>	179
<i>Coherence</i>	179
<i>Collaboration</i>	180
<i>Differentiation</i>	180
<i>Praxis</i>	181
<i>The Organizational Learning Core Framework</i>	181
Themes.....	182
<i>Theme One: The Organizational Learning Core is central to personal and organizational change</i>	183
Theme Two: The Organizational Learning Core provides a framework for authentic, multidimensional coherence	186
Theme Three: Differentiation within the Organizational Learning Core maintains coherence while supporting the unique needs of learning agents	191
Conclusion	193
Chapter 6: Discussion	195
Introduction.....	195
Summary of the Study	195
Discussion.....	197
<i>Structure</i>	198
<i>Interactions</i>	199
<i>Coherence</i>	202
Implications	203
Limitations	206
Future Research	207
Researcher Reflection	209
Conclusion	211
References	214
Appendix A	224

Appendix B231

Appendix C246

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Table	Title of Table	Page Number
2.1	Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning	26
2.2	Mezirow's Ten Phases of Transformational Learning	39
2.3	Fullan's Six Secrets of Change	43
2.4	SSD Principal Professional Learning Meeting Structure	46
2.5	2021-2022 SSD Principal Professional Learning Topics	48
2.6	Key Change Players Defined in the Context of this Study	55
2.7	2021-2022 SSD Quarterly Focus Areas	60
2.8	Effective Professional Learning Features in the SSD Principal Professional Learning Program	67
2.9	CBAM Stages of Concern	75
2.10	CBAM Levels of Use	75
2.11	Barriers to Change	77
2.12	Interactions Among Key Players in a Professional Learning Context	80
3.1	Case Study Participants- Evidence of Engagement	88
3.2	Case Study Participant Demographics	88
3.3	Principal Arthur's Walkthrough Data- Frequency	92
3.4	Principal Arthur's Walkthrough Data- Implementation	92
3.5	Example of Document Analysis and Probe Development	95
3.6	Example of Initial Coding	99
3.7	Example of Axial Coding and Theme Development	100
3.8	Example of Replication Logic	101
4.1	Overview of Individual Findings	108

5.1	Overview of Common Findings Related to the Key Players of Change in a Professional Learning Context	166
5.2	Critical Connection Points between Professional Learning and Change	178
5.3	Elements of the Organizational Learning Core	184
5.4	Horizontal Coherence within the Organizational Learning Core	187
5.5	Vertical Coherence within the Organizational Learning Core	189
Figure	Title of Figure	Page Number
1.1	Change in a Professional Learning Context Leading to Transformational Learning	17
2.1	Organizing Framework: Change and Principal Professional Learning	23
2.2	Theory of Action for the SSD Principal Professional Learning Program	45
2.3	Educational Change Context Logic Model	52
2.4	Change in a Professional Learning Context	53
2.5	SSD Instructional Vision	58
2.6	Components of the Culture of Learning Principle	59
3.1	Multi-Case Study Design	86
3.2	Data Collection for Individual Cases	90
3.3	Principal Arthur's Walkthrough Data	93
5.1	Change in a Professional Learning Context	165
5.2	The Organizational Learning Core	182

ABSTRACT

Principals are regularly expected to navigate and lead in contexts of complex change. While professional learning is often seen as a key lever for change, there is minimal research regarding principal professional learning in change contexts and even fewer studies making explicit connections between professional learning and change. This qualitative multi-case study of four principals actively engaged in a district designed and facilitated yearlong professional learning program explores the experiences of principals within the program and identifies critical connection points between professional learning and change. Through a series of semi-structured interviews and document analyses, findings emerged indicating that principals had both unique and common experiences within the program. While not every principal found the professional learning program to be transformational, all four principals identified unique changes in knowledge, beliefs, and practice in relation to the learning priorities and discussed individualized barriers and facilitators to change. Across the four cases, common experiences were identified regarding each of the key players of change: innovation/learning priority, learning environment, change facilitator, and learning environment. Five critical connection points between professional learning and change were identified: collective leadership, coherence, collaboration, differentiation, and praxis. In light of these critical connection points, the Organizational Learning Core emerged as a framework to illustrate the complexity and coherence of the learning priorities within the change context.

Three themes were identified regarding the Organizational Learning Core. The first theme is that the Organizational Learning Core is central to personal and organizational change. This theme explores the parallel nature of instruction and learning at the classroom, school and

district levels. The second theme is that the Organizational Learning Core provides a framework for authentic, multidimensional coherence. This theme discusses the nature of vertical and horizontal coherence that is authentically established by those within the organization. The third theme is that differentiation within the Organizational Learning Core maintains coherence while supporting the unique needs of learning agents. This theme discusses the need for coherence, while also providing differentiated learning opportunities in response to the unique learning needs of each learning agent. These findings contribute to the fields of both professional learning and change, and serve to connect them, by illuminating evidence that professional learning for principals is a necessary component of organizational change.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

We are living in a complex context of change. Educators across the world are navigating change as a result of a global pandemic. Within the United States, there are changes in society's expectations of, and demands on, education, and in many school districts throughout the nation, changes have resulted from increased teacher and school leader turnover (Grissom et. al., 2021). While this may sound alarming, change can lead to improved outcomes throughout an organization (Fullan, 2016), and district and school leaders play a significant role in meaningful organizational change (Grissom et. al, 2021).

Professional learning serves as a key lever within a complex change context, providing an avenue for personal transformative learning that can be leveraged to support organizational change (Moore & Kochan, 2013; Naidoo, 2019; Newman, 2013; Parson, Hunter, & Kallio, 2016; Pringle 2021; Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). Given the substantial role of principals in leading meaningful change, high quality professional learning for school leaders can have a positive impact on the degree and nature of change experienced within an organization (Kang et. al., 2016; Nunnery et. al, 2011; Parson et. al., 2016; Rowland, 2017). Additionally, district leaders are in a unique position to use their knowledge of the local context to facilitate principal professional learning experiences that support change (Ikemoto et. al., 2014).

Within a professional learning context, principals engage in change on two levels: personal transformative change which transfers to leading organizational changes within their schools. Principal professional learning can develop a school leader's efficacy in leading organizational change by providing opportunities for principals to engage in personal transformative learning (Jensen & Moller, 2013; Kang, Lyu, & Sun, 2016; Mayes & Gethers,

2018; Naidoo, 2019). However, while principals may participate in a common professional learning program, outcomes vary because each principal is unique and serves in a distinct context. Therefore, professional learning designers and facilitators must recognize that principals experience professional learning through their own specialized lens (Herrmann et. al., 2019; Patojoki et. al, 2021).

In addition to recognizing that each principal will experience professional learning uniquely, when designing and facilitating effective professional learning, it is important for district leaders to understand the factors that interact within a professional learning context to inform their theory of action within the principal professional learning program (Ellsworth, 2000). Therefore, it is necessary to explore these interactions from the principal perspective to understand how principals experience change in a professional learning program. By exploring principals' unique and common barriers and facilitators to change within a professional learning program, valuable insight can be discovered and used to inform the design and facilitation of increasingly effective learning for principals, resulting in more successful change in school systems.

Problem Statement

Few studies make explicit connections between professional learning and the role it plays in a context of change. Additionally, while there is a growing body of research on *teacher* professional learning, studies on *principal* professional learning are scarce (Hermann et.al., 2019; Rowland, 2017). Because principals play a significant role in leading change (Darling-Hammond et. al., 2007; Grissom et. al., 2021), it is important to understand the barriers and facilitators to change that present themselves within the context of principal professional learning

(Ellsworth, 2000). When attending to these barriers and facilitators, district leaders responsible for designing and facilitating principal professional learning can develop a meaningful professional learning program for principals within a context of change (Ikemoto, 2014). When principals experience high quality professional learning that fosters individual transformative change, their efficacy in leading organizational change can be cultivated, leading to successful change in educational systems (Darling-Hammond et. al., 2007).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to understand how principals experience change in a yearlong district designed and facilitated professional learning program by exploring their unique and common facilitators and barriers to change as well as to identify critical connection points between professional learning and change. Through this study, I aim to gain insight on the role of principal professional learning within a districtwide approach to leading change in educational systems.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide this study:

1. How do principals experience a yearlong professional learning program focused on implementing the district's instructional vision through an asset orientation, strengthening professional learning communities, and fostering high quality literacy instruction?
 - a. What changes in knowledge do principals identify in each area?
 - b. What changes in beliefs do principals identify in each area?
 - c. What changes in practices do principals identify in each area?
 - d. What barriers and facilitators to change do principals identify in each area?
2. What are the critical connection points between professional learning and change within

the program?

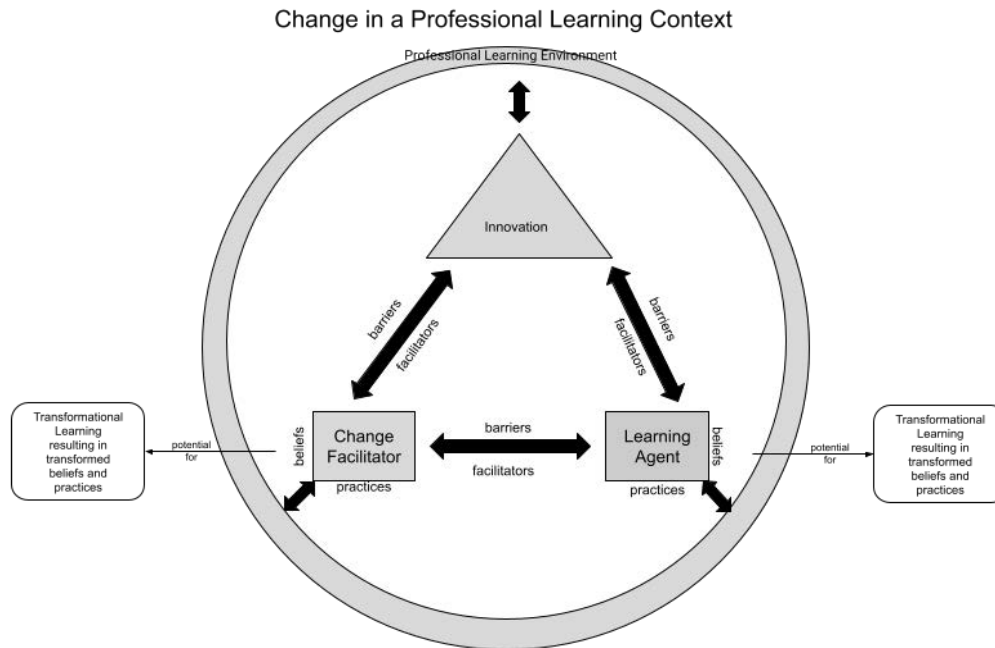
Understanding how principals experience change in a professional learning program along with the critical connection points between professional learning and change can provide insight into developing more effective approaches to leading change through effective principal professional learning practices within educational systems (Darling-Hammond et. al., 2007; Fullan, 2016).

Overview of Theoretical Framework

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) define a theoretical framework as “the underlying structure, the scaffolding or frame of [a] study” (p. 85). The theoretical framework is a central component of the conceptual framework, which “helps [one] consider the roles that existing, or formal, theory, play in the development of [their] research question and the goals of [their] studies as well as throughout the entire process of designing and engaging in [their] research” (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 46). This study intertwines formal theories of change and professional learning into a conceptual framework that illustrates the nature of change in a professional learning context (Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1

Change in a Professional Learning Context Leading to Transformational Learning



Each element of this framework comes from Ellsworth’s (2000) explanation of the educational change process, which is assembled from multiple educational change theories. Each element of this framework is described more in depth in the following review of literature. Furthermore, underlying this conceptual framework of change in a professional learning context is the theoretical framework that will serve as the lens through which I will explore the principals’ experiences with change in a professional learning context.

Mezirow’s (2000) Transformational Learning Theory undergirds this conceptual framework. This theory of adult learning “refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective” (Mezirow, 2000, pp. 7-8). Within this theory, Mezirow (2000) outlines ten phases of

transformation learning (Table 2.1), and these phases will guide the exploration of the principals' experiences with personal change through the professional learning program.

Overview of Methodology

I will use a qualitative case study to explore principals' experiences with change in a professional learning context (Yin, 2018). Within this case study, I will collect data on four cases—two elementary principals and two secondary principals— following a data collection protocol that includes two rounds of document analysis and a series of three interviews with each principal. I will explore each case individually by conducting an initial document analysis to inform the interview probes, engaging in three interviews with each principal—focusing on context in the first interview, personal change in the second, and leading change in the third— followed by a final document analysis after the interviews for triangulation. After each case, I will analyze the findings of that case and use replication logic after each subsequent case to conduct cross case analysis, concluding with an integrated cross-case analysis of all four cases (Yin, 2018).

Significance of the Research

Principals play an integral role in leading change within educational systems (Fullan, 2016; Grissom et. al, 2021). Not only are they responsible for engaging in personal change by continuously learning more effective ways to foster cultures of learning and high levels of student achievement, they are also responsible for leading organizational change within their schools to increase learning for teachers and students (Grissom et. al., 2021). This study explores the experience of SSD principals in a yearlong district designed and facilitated professional learning program to better understand how principals engage in personal change. A deeper

understanding of the barriers and facilitators to personal change within the context of a principal professional learning program can provide insight into developing more effective approaches to leading organizational change throughout educational systems.

Organization of the Study

In this dissertation, Chapter 2 will provide essential context for understanding the design of this study. Extending beyond a classic review of the literature, in chapter 2, I narrate the professional learning development process to help the reader understand the decisions that were made during the design and facilitation of the professional learning program. Alongside these descriptions, I make connections to the literature, telling the story of how one district engaged in a nuanced application of the literature in their unique context. In Chapter 3, I will explain the methods of the study. I provide a detailed description of the qualitative multi-case study design that will be used to explore the experiences of principals within the professional learning program. In Chapter 4, I will discuss the findings of each case within the study, and in Chapter 5, I discuss the common findings across the multiple case studies. In Chapter 6, I will conclude with a discussion of the themes that emerged from the findings, along with implications for future practice and research.

Chapter Summary

School principals play a significant role in leading meaningful organizational change within a school district. Given the recent changes in the educational context within the United States, the importance of this role is magnified (Darling-Hammond et. al., 2007; Grissom et. al., 2021). Therefore, principal professional learning has the potential to make a meaningful impact on the degree of change that is experienced within a school district (Patojoki et. al, 2021). There

is little research on principal professional learning (Darling-Hammond et. al., 2007; Hermann et.al., 2019; Rowland, 2017), and even less that connects professional learning and the process of change, therefore, this study will explore how principals experience change within the context of a yearlong district designed and facilitated principal professional learning program. Through this investigation of the barriers and facilitators to leading personal and organizational change, I will gain insight into how to leverage principal professional learning to foster meaningful change within educational systems.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

To make a positive difference in a changing school district, this study illustrates how I worked alongside others to “use research and theory *selectively* in the service of practice” (Fullan, 2011, p. xii). In this literature review, I aim to: (a) provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between principal professional learning and change by situating the nature of change and the principal professional learning program within the individualized organizational factors of Sunshine School District (SSD), and (b) share how the leadership perspectives and beliefs that framed the development of the professional learning program are connected to the literature that informed the program design and facilitation moves. This discussion will include both the relevant literature and the research- and evidence-based decision making that brought the professional learning program to life. While it is beneficial to understand what the literature says about principal professional learning and change, it is not sufficient for understanding the full context of this study because the way literature is interpreted and enacted influences the nature of professional learning and change. It is important to recognize that impact is made through implementation, and literature without action is inert. While theory and research are valuable for informing ways to foster change through professional learning, it is through the nuanced application of theory and research that the outcomes of professional learning and change are shaped in each unique context (Chang et.al., 2017; Durand et. al., 2016; Ellsworth, 2000). Change is multidimensionally complex and is influenced by myriad factors (Ellsworth, 2000; Fullan, 2016), with professional learning being just one of those factors. Furthermore, the multifacetedness of professional learning adds another dimension of complexity to the change process, especially when considering the intentionality of planning necessary for both the design

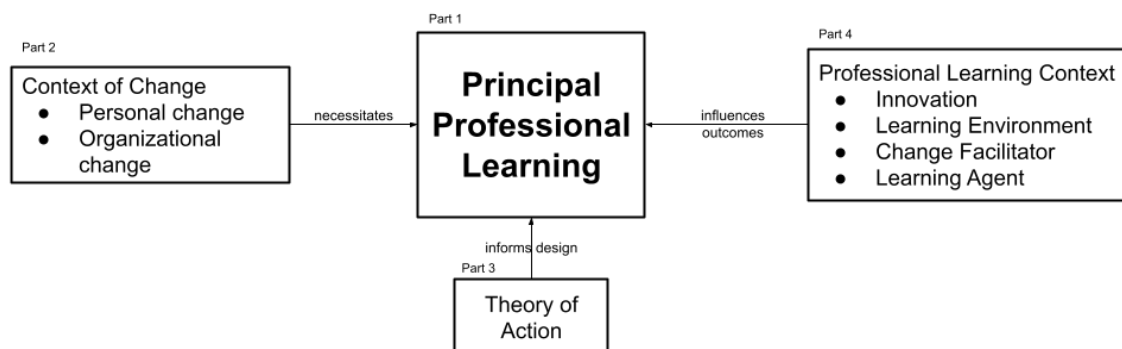
and implementation of an effective professional learning program (Darling-Hammond et. al, 2007). Therefore, through this literature review, I will discuss the intentional design and facilitation decisions that were made in response to the literature that informed the development and implementation of a program for principal professional learning to illuminate the inherent complexities of the context and provide a more comprehensive understanding of this study.

Chapter Organization

Figure 2.1 serves as an organizing framework for this literature review. It illustrates how *principal professional learning* is necessitated by a *context of change*, how it is influenced by the *theory of action* that informs the professional learning design, and how factors within a *professional learning context* (innovation, learning environment, change facilitator, and learning agent) influence the outcomes of principal professional learning. In the following sections, I will review the literature related to each of the elements in Figure 2.1, along with a discussion of how this literature was applied within the SSD Principal Professional Learning program.

Figure 2.1

Organizing Framework: Change and Principal Professional Learning



In part 1 of this literature review, I will discuss *principal professional learning* and the role it can play in a context of change. In part 2, I will consider the *context of change* within which this study is situated, discussing the nature of personal and organizational change. In part 3, I will discuss the *theory of action* that informed the design and facilitation of the professional learning program, and in part 4, I will examine the conceptual framework that frames the principal's experience with change in the professional learning program. I will explore each element of the conceptual framework, starting with the innovation, followed by the learning environment, and closing with the roles of the change facilitators and the learning agents. I will conclude with a discussion of the interactions between each element of the conceptual framework providing a comprehensive description of change in a professional learning context for principals.

Part 1: Principal Professional Learning

Professional learning is viewed as a key lever for change and is prominently situated within change-cultures (Moore & Kochan, 2013; Naidoo, 2019; Newman, 2013; Parson, Hunter, & Kallio, 2016; Pringle 2021; Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). Because principals have significant influence on school outcomes (Darling-Hammond et. al., 2007; Grissom et. al., 2021), it stands to reason that principal professional learning has the potential to play a powerful role in educational change. Therefore, to facilitate effective change, district leaders should prioritize the development and implementation of high quality professional learning for principals. To inform the design and facilitation of high quality learning experiences, Learning Forward (n.d.) has developed Standards for Professional Learning that define characteristics of effective professional learning. However, these standards are broad in nature and are intended to be

generalized across professional learning experiences for a variety of audiences, and are not specific to principal professional learning. Additionally, few studies have explored the role of principal professional learning in the change process. While there is a growing body of research on the relationship between professional learning and changing *teaching* practice (Avidov-Ungar & Ezran, 2020; Chang et. al., 2017; Darling-Hammond, Hyler & Gardner, 2017; Desimone, 2009; McDonald, 2009), there is significantly less literature on effective *principal* professional learning and changing *leadership* practices (Darling-Hammond et. al., 2007; Hermann et.al., 2019; Rowland, 2017). Nonetheless, district leaders can use the findings from the research that *has* been conducted around principal professional learning alongside Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional Learning to inform the design and facilitation of district-based principal professional learning programs.

Professional Learning Standards

To inform professional learning experiences for all educators, including teachers and principals, Learning Forward, a leading international professional learning association, has developed the Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, n.d.). These standards can be used by educators to inform the design and implementation of effective professional learning that “leads to effective teaching practices, supportive leadership, and improved student results” (Learning Forward, 2022h). While these standards do not differentiate between teachers and principals, they serve as a foundational guide for considering the multiple facets of effective professional learning. An overview of the Standards for Professional Learning can be seen in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1*Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning*

Standard	Description
Learning Communities	“Professional learning within communities requires continuous improvement, promotes collective responsibility, and supports alignment of individual, team, school, and school system goals” (Learning Forward, 2022d).
Resources	“Effective professional learning requires human, fiscal, material, technology, and time resources to achieve student learning goals” (Learning Forward, 2022g).
Learning Designs	“Integrating theories, research, and models of human learning into the planning and design of professional learning contributes to its effectiveness” (Learning Forward, 2022e).
Outcomes	“Professional learning that increases results for all students addresses the learning outcomes and performance expectations education systems designate for students and educators” (Learning Forward, 2022f).
Leadership	“Leaders throughout the pre-K-12 education community recognize effective professional learning as a key strategy for supporting significant school and school system improvements to increase results for all students” (Learning Forward, 2022c).
Data	“Data from multiple sources enrich decisions about professional learning that leads to increased results for every student” (Learning Forward, 2022a).
Implementation	“Those responsible for professional learning apply findings from change process research to support long-term change in practice by extending learning over time” (Learning Forward, 2022b).

In addition to these seven standards, Learning Forward (n.d.) also outlines four prerequisites for effective professional learning:

1. Educators' commitment to students, *all* students, is the foundation of effective professional learning.
2. Each educator involved in professional learning comes to the experience ready to learn.
3. Because there are disparate experience levels and use of practice among educators, professional learning can foster collaborative inquiry and learning that enhances individual and collective performance.
4. Like all learners, educators learn in different ways and at different rates (p. 3).

Attending to these prerequisites and Standards for Professional Learning has the potential to be advantageous in the design and implementation of effective professional learning experiences that make a positive impact on educator practice and student achievement (Learning Forward, n.d.).

Evidence of these professional learning standards and prerequisites can be found within the overall structure of SSD's yearlong principal professional learning program. The program consisted of seven professional learning sessions occurring over the duration of a school-year, showing evidence of the implementation and leadership standards. During each meeting, data was used to inform adjustments to the facilitation and content of the sessions and to monitor implementation progress of the content discussed during the sessions, reflecting the data and outcomes standards. Collaborative learning experiences were centered within the professional learning program, consisting of a variety of collaborative structures, ranging from brief informal discussions to more formal protocol-driven conversations among principal teams focused on a common grade level and content area. Additionally, principals were grouped in a variety of

ways for these diverse collaborative experiences, including self-selected groups, groups formed by school feeder patterns, grade-level and content focus groups, and groups by school level (elementary and secondary). The inclusion of a variety of collaborative experience and groupings takes prerequisites three and four into account by avoiding a one-size-fits-all approach to professional learning and honoring the differing levels of experiences and learning needs of principals (Learning Forward, n.d.). Using a variety of collaborative structures also aligns with the learning community, resources, and learning designs standards. Working in collaborative teams fosters a collective commitment to aligned learning goals (learning community), maximizes learning in a limited amount of time by allowing school leaders to ask questions and share ideas related to their individualized contexts, including ways they have used their resources to support student achievement (resources), and incorporates active engagement, a key element of evidenced-based professional learning theory (learning designs). The Learning Forward Standards and Prerequisites for Professional Learning provide a strong foundation for informing the design and implementation of professional learning, but in order to attend to the nuances that set principal professional learning apart (Naidoo, 2019), it is also necessary to understand what the literature says about effective professional learning specifically designed for school leaders.

Principal professional learning has the potential to facilitate transformational changes in leaders' beliefs and practices (Kang et. al., 2016; Nunnery et. al, 2011; Parson et. al., 2016; Rowland, 2017). However, the roles and responsibilities of a principal are significantly complex (Grissom et. al., 2021), and attending to the effective design elements, such as the ones outlined in the Standards for Professional Learning, does not always lead to results for principals (Herrmann et. al., 2019; Nasreen & Odhiambo, 2018). Therefore it is essential for district leaders

responsible for designing and implementing principal professional learning to determine the most effective structures and content by drawing from the evidenced-based design features of *principal* professional learning to increase the likelihood of success.

Structure of Effective Principal Professional Learning

The literature on principal professional learning supports the structures outlined in Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning, while providing a more nuanced context of how these structures have influenced the learning experience of principals. Overall, effective professional learning for principals prioritizes collaboration (Darling-Hammond et. al., 2007; Ikemoto et. al., 2014; Umekubo et. al, 2015), is job-embedded (Aguilar et. al., 2011; Darling-Hammond et. al., 2007; Ikemoto et. al., 2014; Zepeda, 2014) and ongoing with opportunities for continuous assessment and adjustment in response to the needs of principals (Ikemoto et. al., 2014; Zepeda, 2014).

Professional learning and collaboration go hand-in-hand, and effective principal professional learning provides opportunities for principals to collaborate and develop their collegial learning networks (Darling-Hammond et. al., 2007; Learning Forward, 2022d; Umekubo et. al, 2015). Additionally, collaboration can also play a vital role in the initial design of professional learning experiences for principals. In the report, *Great Principals at Scale: Creating District Conditions that Enable All Principals to be Effective*, Ikemoto et. al. (2014) highlights the value of collaborative efforts between district leaders and school principals in the development stages, stating that, "This interplay of perspectives and knowledge [of district leaders and school-based leaders] is leveraged to strengthen initiatives and to openly address and fix reforms, structures, or initiatives that are ineffective" (p. 21). Therefore, to design and

facilitate effective professional learning for principals, it is important to foreground collaboration, starting with its inception and continuing throughout implementation.

In addition to providing collaborative learning experiences, job-embedded experiences (Aguilar et. al., 2011; Zepeda, 2014), with opportunities for critical feedback (Ikemoto et. al., 2014) have also proved to be effective structures for principal professional learning. Learning grounded in practice allows principals the opportunity to focus on the knowledge and skills that most directly connect to their daily roles and responsibilities, leading to meaningful professional learning (Darling-Hammond et. al., 2007; Learning Forward, 2022e). In the report, *Preparing School Leaders for a Changing World: Lessons from Exemplary Leadership Development Programs*, Darling-Hammond et. al. (2007) determined:

the exemplary in-service programs had developed a comprehensive approach to developing practice *in practice*, through a well connected set of learning opportunities that are informed by a coherent view of teaching and learning and are grounded in both theory and practice. (p. 146)

This report highlights the importance of meaningful learning experiences aligned with the daily work of principals, while also being “tied to studies of teaching, learning, and leadership grounded in research and theory” (Darling-Hammond et. al., 2007, p. 146). Therefore, when principals receive individualized job-embedded support, paired with feedback that is aligned to theory and evidence-based practices and specifically tailored to their work, they are more likely to learn as individuals, while also contributing to the learning of teachers and students within their schools.

Researchers also emphasize the need for sustained, coherent, and relevant professional learning opportunities (Darling-Hammond et. al., 2007; Ikemoto et. al., 2014; Zepeda, 2014).

Ongoing professional learning experiences allow for a continuous cycle of implementation, reflection and adjustment for the principals participating in the learning process, as well as the district leaders facilitating it, leading to increased effectiveness overall (Ikemoto et. al., 2014; Learning Forward, 2022b). In studies where principal professional learning was *not* ongoing, coherent, and adjusted based on input from participants, researchers found that change was less effective (Mackey et.al, 2017), and principals found the experiences less valuable (Nasreen & Odhiambo, 2018). In their review of exemplary leadership development programs, Darling-Hammod et. al. (2007) found that “rather than offering an array of disparate and ever-changing one-shot workshops, these [exemplary] systems organized a continuous learning program aimed at the development and implementation of specific professional practices required of instructional leaders” (p. 146). Therefore, in light of these findings, Darling-Hammond recommends that district leaders should include ongoing experiences that build on previous learning with opportunities for reflection and adjustment along the way when designing and implementing principal professional learning.

In SSD, district leaders did attend to some of these structural features of effective principal professional learning in the design and implementation of the program. In the spring of 2021, a task force of district and school-based leaders convened to collectively determine which aspects of the district’s instructional vision would be the focus of each quarter for the 2021-2022 school year. This task force also collaboratively determined the frequency and format of the ongoing principal professional learning sessions based on input from principals. Seven sessions were scheduled for the 2021-2022 school year, with each session held on the third Tuesday of the month. Each full day session included three main parts: (a) whole group learning with

embedded opportunities for collaborative discussion, where elementary and secondary principals focused on implementation of the district's instructional vision (b) collaboration in principal professional learning community teams, where principals worked alongside other principals focusing on a common grade level and content area to learn ways to support specific teacher professional learning community teams within their school, and (c) breakout sessions by level (elementary and secondary) focused on topics of need based on ongoing input from school leaders throughout the year. While the ongoing principal professional learning program prioritized collaboration (Darling-Hammond et. al., 2007; Ikemoto et. al., 2014; Umekubo et. al, 2015) and included opportunities for continuous assessment and adjustment in response to the needs of principals (Ikemoto et. al., 2014; Zepeda, 2014), there was a lack of job-embedded learning experiences with opportunities for critical feedback. Although the professional learning program included relevant content and practical skills, and principals were expected to implement practices in their schools and review evidence of implementation during subsequent sessions, these learning experiences took place outside of their school context, therefore diverging from the job-embedded nature found most effective in the research (Aguilar et. al., 2011; Darling-Hammond et. al., 2007; Ikemoto et. al., 2014; Zepeda, 2014).

Using the literature to determine effective structures for principal professional learning is important. Equally important is using the literature to identify the most effective content for principal professional learning. While it is important that principals learn, if the learning is not focused on content that will enable them to lead change that increases the effectiveness of

teaching and learning within themselves and their schools, the fundamental purpose of principal professional learning will not be realized.

Content of Effective Principal Professional Learning

The roles and responsibilities of principals are extensive. There is not enough time in a year to provide learning opportunities around every aspect of a principal's job. Therefore, it is necessary to prioritize the content of principal professional learning to foreground the roles and responsibilities that have been found to contribute most significantly to improved school and student outcomes. Not only will this help facilitate change more effectively, it can also lead to greater principal satisfaction with the professional learning program (Nasreen & Odhiambo, 2018).

In a recent report commissioned by the Wallace Foundation, *How Principals Affect Students and Schools: A Systematic Synthesis of Two Decades of Research*, Grissom et. al. (2021) identify the leadership skills and behaviors that have been found to result in improved outcomes for students and schools. The essential leadership skills for principals can be classified into three main categories: people, instruction, and organization. People skills include those related to “human development and relationship skills (e.g., caring, communication, trust)” (Grissom et. al., 2021, p. xvi). Instructional skills are the “skills to support teachers’ classroom instruction” (Grissom et. al., 2021, p. xvi). Organizational skills include “management skills that transcend schools (e.g., data use, strategic thinking, resources allocation)” (Grissom et. al., 2021, p. xvi). Employing these skills, the following four leadership behaviors have been identified by Grissom et. al. (2021) as those most directly connected to improved school outcomes: (a) engaging in instructionally focused interactions with teachers, (b) building a productive climate,

(c) facilitating collaboration and professional learning communities, and (d) managing personnel and resources strategically. When principal professional learning is designed to develop these leadership skills and inform the implementation of these leadership behaviors, it is more likely to lead to effective outcomes (Grissom et. al., 2021; Ikemoto et. al., 2014; Nasreen & Odhiambo, 2018).

These findings by Grissom et. al (2021) support the position that principal professional learning should maintain a strong focus on developing skills in the areas of curriculum and instruction (Darling-Hammond et. al., 2007; Jensen & Møller, 2013). Furthermore, in their report on exemplary leadership development programs, Darling-Hammond et. al (2007) describe the types of learning experiences that were found to be effective in developing leadership skills, explaining that effective “practices typically included developing shared school-wide goals and direction, observing and providing feedback to teachers, planning professional development and other productive learning experiences for teachers, using data to guide school improvement, and developing learning communities” (p. 146). Ultimately, researchers have found that effective principal professional learning has the potential to be most effective when focused on content related to leading people effectively, managing the organization strategically, and most importantly, supporting teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond et. al., 2007; Grissom et. al., 2021; Ikemoto et. al., 2014; Jensen & Møller, 2013, Nasreen & Odhiambo, 2018).

The content of the SSD principal professional learning program focused on three district priorities: (a) implementing the district’s instructional vision through an asset orientation, (b) strengthening professional learning communities, and (c) fostering high quality literacy instruction. These priorities reflect the types of content that studies of effective principal

professional learning found to be most beneficial (Darling-Hammond et. al., 2007; Grissom et. al., 2021; Ikemoto et. al., 2014; Jensen & Møller, 2013, Nasreen & Odhiambo, 2018), and provided a shared direction for the district during the 2021-2022 school year, with many principals using these priorities to inform their school-wide goals. Within each of the seven professional learning sessions, principals explored elements of the district's instructional vision in depth. For each element explored, they ascertained their school's current level of implementation and developed ways to leverage available resources to foster instructionally focused interactions designed to continue to strengthen implementation within their schools. In each session, principals reviewed data from the walkthrough dashboard to guide the reflection and planning process. In addition to this continuous focus on instructional practice, each session included opportunities for principals to experience and learn more about strengthening collaboration within professional learning communities, which is another key leadership behavior (Darling-Hammond et. al., 2007; Grissom et. al., 2021; Ikemoto et. al., 2014).

With an understanding the importance of principal professional learning in fostering change, along with the research-based structures and content of effective principal professional learning, SSD district leaders collaboratively designed and implemented a yearlong professional learning program for principals during the 2021-2022 school year to provide principals with an opportunity to engage in personal change (Mezirow, 2000) and lead organizational change

within their schools (Ellsworth, 2000; Fullan, 2016). In the following section, I will discuss the context of change in which this principal professional learning program is situated.

Part 2: A Context of Change

For decades, education in the United States has endured a state of continuous change (Ellsworth, 2000; Fullan, 2016; Leithwood et. al., 1999). From the reform initiatives of the “adoption era” in the 1960’s to the landmark report, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, published by the National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1983, followed by legislation in the 21st century starting with “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB) in 2002 and “Race to the Top” (RTTT) in 2009, as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (Fullan, 2016), U.S. educators have experienced a continuous dose of change. However, in March 2020, schools were propelled into change on a new level when, for the first time in our nation’s history, schools were closed throughout the United States (and the world) in response to the rapid spread of the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) causing the COVID-19 pandemic. This disruption resulted in a need to respond to ever-changing conditions in the pursuit of ensuring both public safety and instructional continuity.

While COVID-19 conditions served as a catalyst for unprecedented educational change throughout the United States, Sunshine School District (SSD) was faced with an additional layer of change to contend with in March, 2020: a new superintendent and a new district leadership team. Due to transitions unrelated to the pandemic, new leadership was hired for the top leadership positions in the district, which resulted in a shift in leadership style and adjustments to ways of work for many. The following district leadership positions were filled in the spring and summer of 2020: Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent for Operations, Chief of Academics,

Chief of Elementary, Director of K-12 Education, Director of Climate and Culture, Director of Exceptional Student Education, Director of Information Technology Services, and the Supervisor of Professional Learning. Furthermore, many of these district leadership positions were filled by current school administrators, causing a turnover in school leadership throughout the district as well. With so many new school and district leaders, the changes required by the pandemic were experienced uniquely by these individuals who were not only learning to operate under novel and ever-changing safety and instructional conditions caused by the pandemic, but were also learning a new position while leading others in this context of change.

While navigating changes necessitated by a global pandemic and the local factors of changing leadership, new state policy contributed another layer of complexity to the change context of Sunshine School District. In 2019, the governor issued an executive order requiring the development of new math and literacy state standards (Florida's BEST Standards, 2020), following "the most aggressive transition timeline in Florida's history" (Oliva, 2020, p.1). Following this timeline, professional development would begin in the 2020-2021 school year, full implementation of the new literacy standards in kindergarten through second grade would begin in the 2021-2022 school year, followed by full implementation of the new math and literacy standards in kindergarten through twelfth grade in 2022-2023. Although this timeline was developed prior to the global pandemic, it remained consistent, even when circumstances changed, resulting in another facet of planning and implementation required of the new district and school leaders of Sunshine School District who were already experiencing the changes of district leadership and leading through a pandemic. Thus, these leaders were faced with leading two types of change: personal change and organizational change (Henderson, 2002). Personal

change is necessary as leaders must first learn about the new initiatives and continuously evolving COVID guidance themselves before sharing with others, and more importantly, they must also learn to navigate the context of their new role as a district leader instead of a school-based leader. Concurrently, leading organizational change is essential for the development and effectiveness of the school district in this context of change (Henderson, 2002).

Personal Change

Personal change takes place within an individual, where one makes changes to their own perspectives, beliefs, and/or actions (Henderson, 2002; Mezirow, 2000). Some scholars view personal change as a precursor to leading organizational change (Argyris, 1999), while others view these change processes as complementary (Henderson, 2002). In the Sunshine School District, new district leaders were propelled into leading personal change and organizational change simultaneously. Taking on a new leadership role with the unprecedented responsibility of leading through a pandemic resulted in what Mezirow (2000) identifies as a disorienting dilemma, which has the potential to initiate transformational change within an individual. He refers to this type of change as transformational learning, a type of learning unique to adults, as it requires objective or subjective reframing of what one knows and believes (Mezirow, 2000). Mezirow (2000) defines ten phases of transformational learning, which are outlined in Table 2.2. These ten phases describe the types of experiences inherent in transformational learning, however, they are not linear and may be experienced to varying degrees (Mezirow, 2000), as I encountered during my transition into district leadership.

Table 2.2*Mezirow's Ten Phases of Transformational Learning*

Phase	Definition
Phase 1	A disorienting dilemma
Phase 2	Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame
Phase 3	A critical assessment of assumptions
Phase 4	Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared
Phase 5	Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
Phase 6	Planning a course of action
Phase 7	Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
Phase 8	Provisional trying of new roles
Phase 9	Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
Phase 10	A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective

As a new district leader experiencing disorientation, I was fearful of not being able to fulfill the responsibilities of the new role, and it is likely that I was not alone in feeling this way given the number of new district and school leaders. However, acknowledging this fear led me to lean on others within the organization for support in exploring new options for effective ways of work (Mezirow, 2000). Through this transition, collaboration among district departments and successful school leaders became more frequent, representing one of Fullan's (2016) "right" drivers of change, as we faced the challenges of ensuring safety and instructional continuity through COVID and learned about the new ELA standards while exploring how to lead a transition to new standards in an already challenging context. Inter-department collaboration and a distributed leadership model where district leaders plan alongside school-based leaders (Fullan, 2016) represents a shift in ways of work within the district with the aim of developing an effective course of action based on a variety of perspectives (Mezirow, 2000). As I experienced

these phases of transformational learning (Mezirow, 2000), I have led myself through personal change as I learned ways to effectively lead teams in learning, as well as planning for, and implementing professional learning experiences at the district level.

These personal changes I experienced can also be described as the development of my professional capital (Fullan, 2014). Hargreaves and Fullan (2015) articulate the importance of developing professional capital as it serves as a key lever for improving educational systems. Fullan describes professional capital as “a function of the interaction of three components: human capital, social capital, and decisional capital” (Fullan, 2014, p. 70). Human capital is a combination of the skillset and willset of individuals, social capital is the capacity of a group to work together and learn from each other, and decisional capital is the ability of an individual (or group) to make effective decisions as a result of expertise acquired over time (Fullan, 2014). Fullan (2014) identifies the development of professional capital in others as a key responsibility of leaders, however, when leaders understand the role of developing professional capital in leading change, it can also be developed within oneself. By approaching my new role with an open mind and a desire to learn, I have worked alongside others to develop my human capital through collaboration and reflection that has allowed me to become more knowledgeable about leading in a pandemic, to gain more experience with virtual teaching and learning, and to learn more about the new state standards. Furthermore, as my human capital grows through intentional learning opportunities, my personal decisional capital will continue to increase.

Experiencing this process of personal change has been an integral part of my transition to district leadership and has influenced my leadership decisions as I have collaboratively designed and facilitated professional learning. Going through this personal change process has helped me

to become better equipped to lead organizational change alongside other leaders throughout the district. Ultimately, through the design and facilitation of the 2021-2022 SSD principal professional learning program, I worked with a team of district and school-based leaders to facilitate a similar personal change process for principals through the district.

Organizational Change

Organizational change takes place on a collective level and involves complex relationships among many factors (Ellsworth, 2000). Ellsworth (2000) identifies the following components of organizational change: the innovation, the environment, the change agent, the change process, and the intended adopter. Each of these components influences the others and their collective interaction determines the degree of change that is made within a system. Ellsworth (2000) states that “change can be understood and managed” (p. xvi). Thus by understanding the role of each component in a system, leaders can learn to navigate change more effectively. In my role as Supervisor of Professional Learning, the change context I am most responsible for is that of professional learning. Through collaboration with other district and school leaders, I have developed a deeper understanding of each of the change components to more effectively lead change through principal professional learning.

In addition to understanding the components of change, it is just as important to understand the nature of change, especially in an educational setting. Fullan (2015) explains that there are two ways to approach educational change: with an innovation-focus and/or with a capacity-building focus. These two approaches are not mutually exclusive, but they differ in form and function. An innovation-focused approach foregrounds the innovation in the change process, and focuses on monitoring the implementation of specific innovations and uses this

information to determine success factors. However, a capacity-building approach to educational change foregrounds the change agent and intended adopters by “ask[ing] how we develop the innovative capacity of organizations and systems to engage in continuous improvement” (Fullan, 2015, p. 55). Although both approaches may be taken in a change system, the prioritized approach in a professional learning context is that of capacity building.

Regardless of the approach taken to change, in Fullan’s (2015) traditional model of change, he outlines three broad phases: initiation, implementation, and continuation (or institutionalization). In the initiation phase, the need for change is identified and leaders within an organization decide to proceed with the change process. In the implementation phase, which usually lasts several years, the change is attempted as members of the organization begin to use the new innovation(s). If those within the organization find the implementation effective, they will move into the final phase of continuation, where the innovation becomes part of the new ways of work within the system. If the innovation is not found to be effective, the innovation will disappear as a result of intentional decisions or by means of attrition (Fullan, 2015).

In light of these broad phases of change, in the 2021-2022 school year, the Sunshine School District is operating in the implementation phase, as it aims to support three district priorities (innovations). These priorities are: (a) implementing the district’s instructional vision through an asset orientation, (b) strengthening professional learning communities, and (c) fostering high quality literacy instruction. These priorities were determined collectively in response to the needs in our changing context and stem from the leadership philosophies of the new district leaders. With a growing understanding of our new roles, and a focus to guide our work, SSD district leaders decided to prioritize a capacity building approach to change, where

ongoing professional learning for school leaders would play an essential role. This approach embodies several of Fullan’s (2008) six secrets of change, which are defined in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3

Fullan’s Six Secrets of Change

Change Secret	Description
Love your employees	“Helping employees find meaning, increased skill development, and making contributions that <i>simultaneously</i> fulfill their own goals and the goals of the organization” (Fullan, 2008, p. 25).
Connect peers with purpose	“Engag[ing] peers in purposeful interaction where quality experiences and results are central to the work” (Fullan, 2008, p. 46).
Capacity building prevails	“Help[ing] [employees] continually develop individually and collectively on the job” (Fullan, 2008, p.63).
Learning is the work	“Address[ing] [an organization’s] core goals and tasks with relentless consistency, while at the same time learning continuously how to get better and better at what they are doing” (Fullan, 2008, p. 76).
Transparency rules	“Assessing, communicating, and acting on data pertaining to the what, how, and outcomes of change efforts” (Fullan, 2008, p. 93).
Systems learn	“Grappling with system complexities, taking action, and then learning from the experiences—all while engaging their leaders, to increase chances that the organization as a whole will learn now and keep on learning” (Fullan, 2008, p. 119).

Recognizing the potential of systems that learn, SSD leaders aimed to act on the importance of connecting peers with purpose, supporting the idea that capacity building prevails and learning is

the work, and sought to provide transparency through the collective use of data to monitor progress and inform next steps.

Educational change is inevitable (Ellsworth, 2000; Fullan, 2016), and the need for change has continued to increase in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and changing educational policy. These changes can be experienced at both the personal (Mezirow, 2000) and systems levels (Ellsworth, 2000; Fullan, 2016). As educators engage in the process of changing themselves (Mezirow, 2000), they also experience and influence organizational change (Fullan, 2016). Within a school system, district leaders are “critical sources of advocacy, support, and initiation of new programs” (Fullan, 2016, p. 62), and district leadership decisions play a pivotal role in the success or failure of change (Durand et.al., 2016; Gregor, 2014; Hardy & Rönnerman, 2019). However, “the principal has always been the ‘gatekeeper’ of change, often determining the fate of innovations coming from the outside or from teacher initiatives on the inside” (Fullan, 2016, p. 62), warranting a much-needed focus on supporting principals with personal and collective capacity building through intentionally designed professional learning experiences aligned to their many roles as a school leader. This study will explore the following theory of action that informed the intentional design of this yearlong district designed and facilitated principal professional learning program.

Part 3: Theory of Action

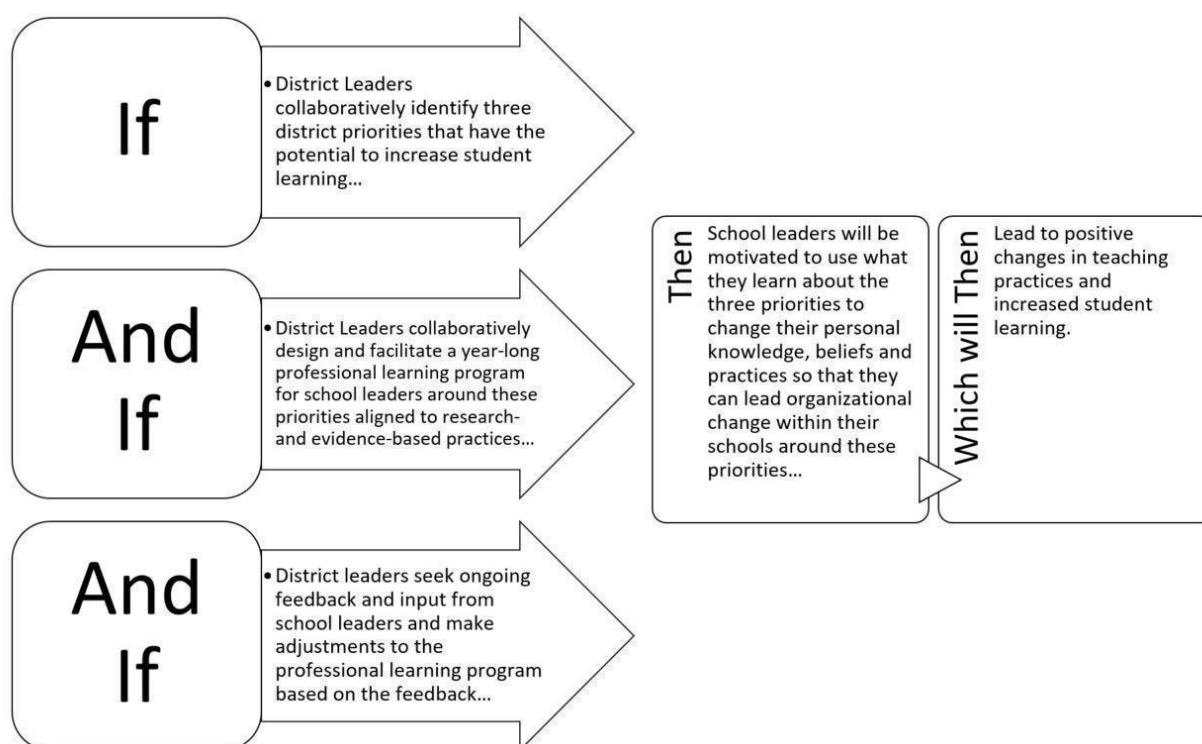
A theory of action is developed by an organization to define the process through which change occurs (Argyris & Schon, 1978). Such a theory defines the strategy being used to bring about change and provides insight into the logic and reasoning that informs decision making throughout the change process. Fullan (2008) explains, “good theories are critical because they give you a handle on the underlying reason (really the underlying thinking) behind actions and their consequences” (p.

16). The theory of action displayed in Figure 2.2 informed the design and implementation of the 2021-2022 principal professional learning program in SSD. However, it is important to acknowledge that “the world has become too complex for any theory to have certainty” (Fullan, 2008, p. 5).

Therefore, through this study I will examine this theory of action and make adjustments based on the findings so that I can continue to lead change more effectively for individuals and the organization to maximize school and student outcomes.

Figure 2.2

Theory of Action for the SSD Principal Professional Learning Program



In the initial planning stages of the SSD principal professional learning program, the new district leadership team aimed to develop a comprehensive approach to developing principal capacity through the identification of three district priorities, relevant to our current context, with the potential

to increase student learning through collaboration across departments (Academic Services, Professional Learning, Exceptional Student Education, Climate and Culture, and Information and Technology Services) and with select leaders representing each school level (elementary, junior high, and high school). Through this collaboration, three district priorities were determined: (a) implementing the district’s instructional vision through an asset orientation, (b) strengthening professional learning communities, and (c) fostering high quality literacy instruction. By intentionally connecting the work of professional learning communities in supporting the district’s instructional vision through an asset orientation with an emphasis on high quality literacy instruction, the yearlong principal professional learning program was designed to be coherent and practical, while also being grounded in research- and evidence-based practices. Members of this team also decided on a consistent structure for the seven sessions (see Table 2.4) along with an overall progression of topics and learning opportunities to provide a general trajectory of change (see Table 2.5), with an understanding that these topics and learning opportunities would be adapted in alignment with the feedback and input from principals throughout the program.

Table 2.4

SSD Principal Professional Learning Meeting Structure

Time (approximate)	Session Format & Focus
8:00-8:30	Welcome & updates from the superintendent
8:30-10:00	Whole group collaborative/interactive session of elementary and secondary principals collectively focused on implementing the instructional vision through an asset orientation, often using district and school-based data to monitor implementation and make decisions for next steps.

10:00-11:00	Principal work in self-selected professional learning community teams focused on supporting the work of a specific grade level and content team in their school. During this time, principals used protocols to examine artifacts from their school-based teams along with grade-level and content standards and resources with the purpose of discussing ideas, sharing successes, and making plans for supporting the work of their school-based teams. After each team meeting, principals had time to reflect in a digital leadership journal to track the progress of their school-based team throughout the year.
11:00-12:00	Lunch
12:00-2:45	Breakout groups by level (elementary and secondary) focused on topics of need identified by principals and facilitated by representatives from a variety of district departments.
2:45-3:00	A session closing where principals reviewed the three district priorities and the learning targets for the day. Before leaving, principals identified one specific action step they would take based on the learning that day.

With the three district priorities guiding the work, district leaders met prior to each of the seven professional learning sessions to review the original overview of topics, make adjustments based on recent principal input and current context, and plan for the design of the learning experiences in the upcoming session. Throughout the year, prior to each session input was solicited about desired breakout session topics. This input was used to inform the breakout session content for the upcoming session. Additionally, to determine the perceived relevance, engagement, and overall effectiveness of the program mid-year, a more comprehensive survey was shared in December to obtain more in-depth feedback, which was used to make mid-year adjustments to the program. Table 2.5 outlines the progression of topics across all seven sessions of the 2021-2022 principal professional learning program. Agendas for each session can be

found in Appendix A and the agendas and protocols used by the Principal Professional Learning Community Teams are included in Appendix B.

Table 2.5

2021-2022 SSD Principal Professional Learning Topics

Date	Whole group Collaborative/Interactive Session	Principal Professional Learning Community Teams	Breakout Groups
8/17/2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Zone of Self-Efficacy Protocol (McKenzie & Skrla, 2011) -District Data Review - Best Practices for Inclusion Models (Florida Inclusion Network) 	Orientation to Principal PLC Teams and Structure for Ongoing Meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ESE Support Facilitation Models -Literacy Updates -Walkthrough and the SSD Vision
9/21/2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Using walkthrough data to inform instructional support -Excerpt from <i>Using Data to Focus Instructional Improvement</i> (James-Ward, 2013) -Video example of how learning targets support student learning -Reflection and planning for next steps for support 	Focus: Explore how to support teams with developing norms and structured agenda to support their work in teams Artifacts to bring: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -An agenda from a school-based PLC Team -Examples of the team's norms and community agreements - Baseline data used by the team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Unconference session for collaboration around topics of interest shared via input survey - Math Updates about new standards -Training on new ELA curriculum facilitated virtually by curriculum representatives

10/19/2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -District Walkthrough Data Review with a focus on Quarterly Focus areas -Explore key features of Learning Targets - Video example of SSD teacher communicating clear learning targets -Reflection and planning for next steps for support 	<p>Focus: Explore how to support teams in aligning assessments to standards and rigor and reviewing common assessments to determine current levels of student learning and how to leverage student assets for learning</p> <p>Artifacts to bring: -Common assessment from a PLC team - Notes from a student and parent interview to identify assets</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Synergy training (SSD's new student management system) -Data monitoring and identifying students whose performance is used to calculate school grade - Training on using reports from Lexia, a new digital reading program, to inform instruction.
11/16/21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -District Walkthrough Data Review with a focus on Quarterly Focus areas -Excerpt from <i>How Principals Affect Students and Schools</i> (Grissom et. al., 2021) - Using school-based walkthrough dashboard to reflect on instruction and walkthrough feedback and plan for next steps 	<p>Focus: Explore how to support teams in aligning common formative assessments to learning targets</p> <p>Artifacts to bring: -Common formative assessment aligned to learning target(s) - Standards progressions to identify pre-requisite knowledge and skills of learning targets</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -ESE placement and services - Learning targets in the context of K-2 literacy (elementary only) - Moving to an asset lens when supporting students with behavior needs

1/18/22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -District Walkthrough Data Review with a focus on Quarterly Focus areas - Success criteria for walkthrough feedback to results in teacher learning 	<p>Focus: Explore how to support teams in reviewing/revising norms and using mid-year data to reflect and plan for next steps</p> <p>Artifacts to bring: - Agenda with norms review process -Team Analysis of Common Assessment document</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Managing facilities and contracts - Evaluations and end-of-year human resources processes - Mid-year data review and collaborative discussions
3/23/22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -District Walkthrough Data Review with a focus on Quarterly Focus areas -Supporting teachers through intentional walkthrough feedback 	<p>Focus: Explore how to support teams in using data from formative assessments to respond to student learning needs</p> <p>Artifact to bring: -Team plan for responding to formative data</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supporting students with disabilities through intentional scheduling - Designing intentional assessment schedules -Best hiring practices
4/19/22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -District Walkthrough Data Review with a focus on Quarterly Focus areas -School-based leadership team development 	<p>Focus: Celebrate the growth of the school-based PLC team made possible by our support this year.</p> <p>Artifacts to bring: Evidence of team success</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Developing a school-based plan to support beginning teachers - Connecting Teachers in PLCs across schools - Master Schedule collaboration

Through these collaboratively developed sessions, with adjustments made in response to principal feedback, the district leadership team aimed to motivate and engage principals in personal change through the development of their knowledge, beliefs, and practices around the

three district priorities, thus equipping them to lead organizational change within their schools. Ultimately, there is a greater likelihood for positive changes in teaching practices and increased student learning when school principals lead school-based organizational changes.

While the ultimate impact of this theory of action lies with teachers and students, the focus on this study is on the changes that principals experience within the professional learning context. Therefore, it is important to understand the nature of change within a professional learning context through a conceptual framework based on the work of Ellsworth (2000) and Fullan (2015).

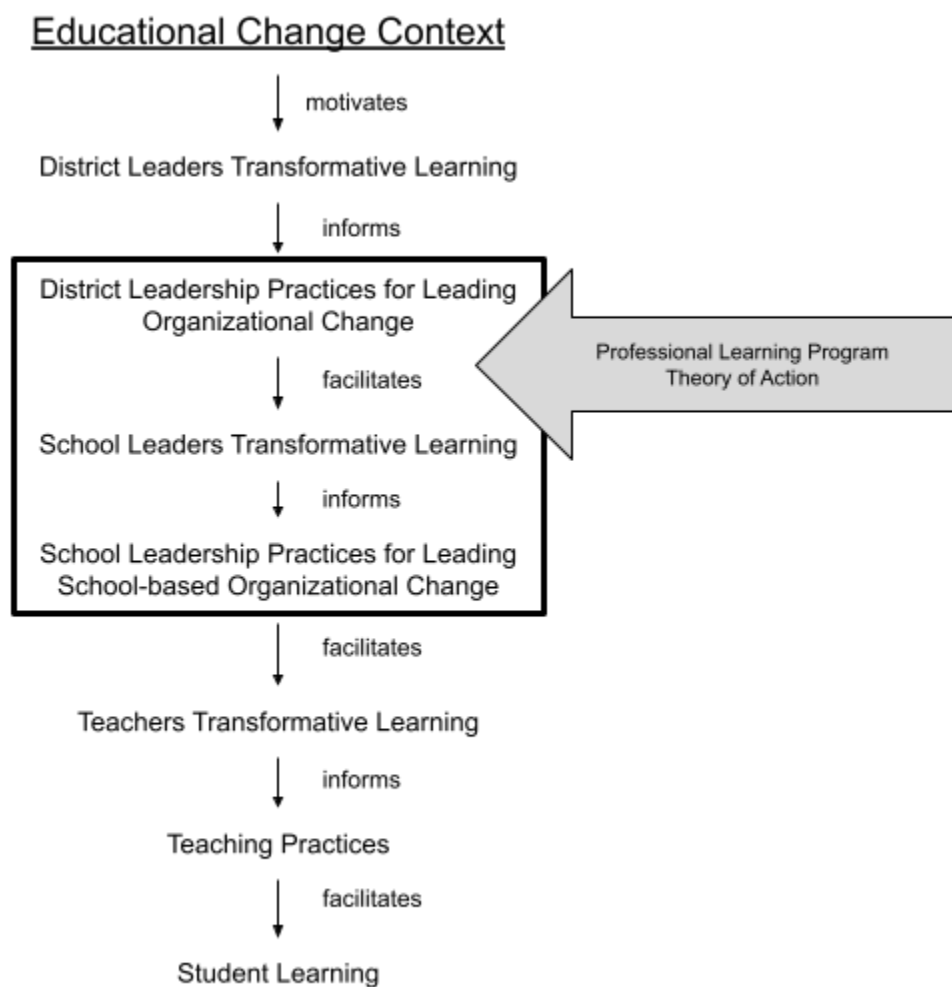
Part 4: Change in a Professional Learning Context

The nature of individual change within a professional learning program is situated within a broader change context (Ellsworth, 2000; Fullan, 2015; Henderson, 2002). Beginning in 2020, SSD was propelled into a context of significant change, which created conditions for newly-appointed district leaders, including myself, to engage in personal transformation. My transformative learning informed my leadership practices for leading organizational change, which included the design and facilitation of a yearlong professional learning program for school leaders during the 2021-2022 school year. The aim of this professional learning program was to facilitate the transformative learning process for school leaders, so that their personal changes in beliefs and practices, and increased human capital (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2015) could inform their leadership practices when leading school-based organizational change, ultimately leading to positive changes in teaching practices and increased student learning. The logic model in Figure 2.3 depicts this broader change context (Ellsworth, 2000; Fullan, 2015; Henderson, 2002). In this study, I will narrow my focus to one segment of this logic model and explore the nuances of

this portion of SSD's educational change context (emphasized in Figure 2.3) by examining how principals experience change while participating in a year-long district designed and facilitated professional learning program. It is within this part of the broader change context that the following conceptual framework, illustrating the nature of change in a professional learning context, is situated.

Figure 2.3

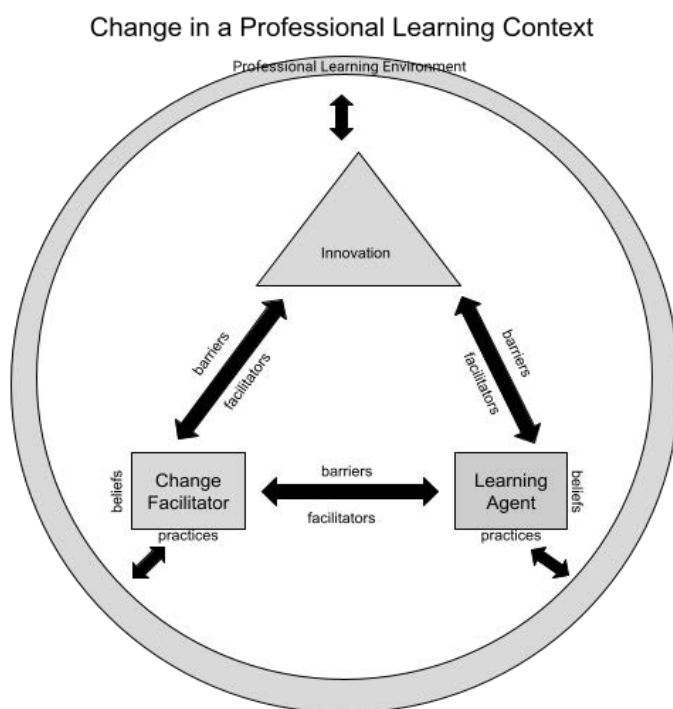
Educational Change Context Logic Model



In *Surviving Change*, Ellsworth (2000) describes the nature of educational change and identifies the following key players in the change process: environment, innovation, change agent, and intended adopter. This identification of key players was intended to be generalized for application to any type of educational change. However, I see learner-centered professional learning programs as a specialized change context, prioritizing a capacity building approach (Fullan, 2015), that should honor the agency and autonomy of the learner. To recognize the nuanced roles of each key player in a *professional learning context*, I have developed the conceptual framework shown in Figure 2.4 to guide this study.

Figure 2.4

Change in a Professional Learning Context



The key players of change in a professional learning context are similar to the more general key players described by Ellsworth (2000) with innovation remaining consistent in both

models. However, there are some distinct differences in the roles of other key players within a professional learning context.

Ellsworth (2000) identifies the *environment* as a key change player. In a general sense, the environment encompasses a wide array of features within a broader organization. In *Surviving Change*, Ellsworth (2000) lists Ely's eight environmental conditions of change: (a) dissatisfaction with the status quo, (b) knowledge and skills exists, (c) resources are available, (d) time is available, (e) rewards or incentives exist for participants, (f) participation is expected and encouraged, (g) commitment by those who are involved (p. 76). However, within a professional learning context, the characteristics of a *learning environment* are more specific. For example, in professional learning, the availability of resources and time needed to facilitate personal change can be narrowed to the resources necessary to engage in effective learning experiences and the time necessary for deep engagement within and across sessions. Participation and commitment can be specific to a series of learning sessions. By narrowing the focus from the broader organizational environment to the specific professional learning environment, this conceptual framework focuses specifically on those characteristics of the learning environment that are within the scope and influence of the design and facilitation of the professional learning program.

Ellsworth (2000) also identifies the *change agent* and *intended adopters* as key players within a change system. However, situating agency within the *change agent* and referring to the learner as an *intended adopter* implies a "banking model" of professional learning (Freire, 2018), and positions the change agent in a position of power by implying that they are responsible for convincing others to adopt the innovation that the change agent deems important. In contrast,

the conceptual framework in this study situates agency within the *learning agent* (rather than an intended adopter), positioning the learner with the power to engage in transformational change in a way that honors their autonomy and individuality. Meanwhile, the role of the *change facilitator* (rather than a change agent) is to create conditions conducive for *learning agents* to determine the changes they deem most appropriate in order to lead themselves through transformational change (Mezirow, 2000) as they build their individual capacity (Fullan, 2015). Table 2.6 outlines the key players of change in a professional learning context and defines each of these players in relation to the SSD principal professional learning program.

Table 2.6

Key Change Players Defined in the Context of this Study

Key Change Player	Definition in this Study
Innovations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Implementing the district’s instructional vision through an asset orientation ● Strengthening professional learning communities ● Fostering high quality literacy instruction
Professional Learning Environment	Yearlong, collaboratively designed and facilitated district principal professional learning program aligned to the district priorities
Change Facilitator	District facilitator(s) during the professional learning program
Learning Agent	School principal during the professional learning program

Within SSD, each of the key players in the change context plays a unique role in the principal professional learning program. Furthermore the interactions among these key players contribute to the change outcomes of the professional learning experience. In the following sections, I will explore each of these key players more in depth and make connections to the

literature that informed the positioning of each key player within the SSD principal professional learning program.

Innovation

The first key player of change is the innovation(s) serving as the catalyst for development (Ellsworth, 2000). In a professional learning setting, the innovations are the focus of the capacity building efforts in the learning experience. Leading up to the 2021-2022 school year, I engaged with a team of district and school-based leaders to identify the district priorities for the yearlong principal professional learning program. We sought to identify the innovations most suitable for our district, given our current circumstances. According to Rogers' (1995) Diffusion of Innovation theory, several attributes can foster diffusion, including the relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability of the innovations. While we did not explicitly use these terms when identifying the innovations, we tacitly considered these characteristics as we discussed the potential change initiatives that would be most beneficial as a focus of the professional learning program. In addition to considering the individual attributes of the change initiatives, we were mindful of the type of change we would introduce: first order or second order. In their book, *District Leadership that Works*, Marzano and Waters (2009) describe the difference between first and second order change, explaining that "changes that are perceived as extensions of the past are usually first order in magnitude; changes that are perceived as breaks with the past are usually second order in magnitude" (p. 105) While we sought to transform teaching and learning for the better, we recognized the intensity of the change context during a global pandemic with new district leadership and new standards and did not want to introduce a level of disruption that would be detrimental to this aim. Therefore,

knowing that odds-beating districts have effectively led change by making second-order change initiatives seem more like first-order change (Durand et. al, 2016), we identified innovations that built upon existing knowledge and practices. Through our discussions, we identified the following three innovations: (a) implementing the district's instructional vision through an asset orientation, (b) strengthening professional learning communities, and (c) fostering high quality literacy instruction. Each of these innovations is grounded in research and theory and embodies some degree of the attributes of innovation (Rogers, 1995). In the following sections, I will discuss each innovation in light of the literature and attributes of innovation.

Implementing the District's Instructional Vision Through an Asset Orientation. In 2020, when the new SSD leadership team was assembled, one of the first collaborative opportunities was to refine the district's instructional vision. Over the previous years, several valuable instructional resources had been introduced within the district to inform instructional practice, however explicit connections between each new resource and the previous ones were not clarified. To provide a more coherent approach to instruction throughout the district and cultivate a common instructional language, a task force of district leaders and school-based leaders collaboratively integrated the previous instructional resources into a cohesive vision that synthesized existing knowledge rather than introducing a completely new vision to the district. This integrated instructional vision illustrated how each element of the various instructional resources aligned to foster high levels of student learning. It was important to our team that we build upon resources that SSD educators were already familiar with, rather than drastically changing directions during this period of heightened change within the district. We recognized that when districts make change seem more first order than second order, there is potential for

change to happen more effectively (Durand et. al., 2016). The instructional resources that were integrated into the district’s instructional vision include: Fisher and Frey’s (2016) Framework for Intentional Teaching, The New Teacher Project’s Core Teaching Rubric (2017), The New Teacher Project’s Opportunity Myth (2018), the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) competencies for social and emotional learning (SEL) (CASEL, n.d.), Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (Horner, et. al., 2010), Culturally Responsive Teaching (Gay, 2002), and Restorative Practices (Gregory et. al, 2016). The visual representation of the instructional vision is shown in Figures 2.5 and 2.6. Figure 2.5 illustrates the overall SSD Instructional Vision and Figure 2.6 illustrates the components of the *culture of learning* principle represented in the center of the SSD Instructional Vision.

Figure 2.5

SSD Instructional Vision

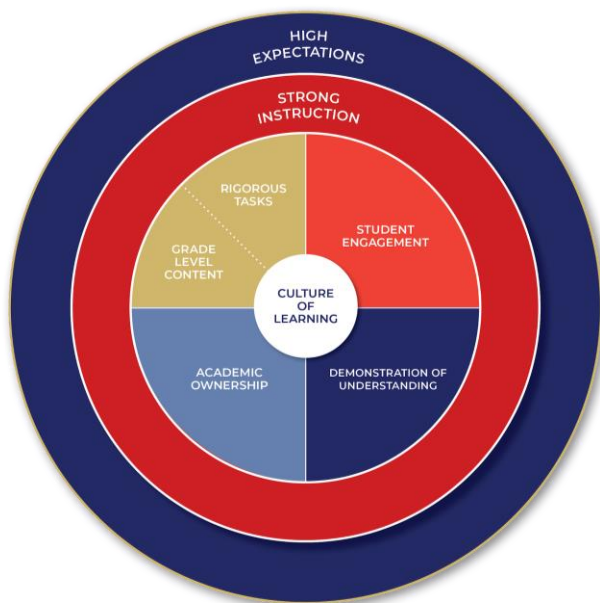
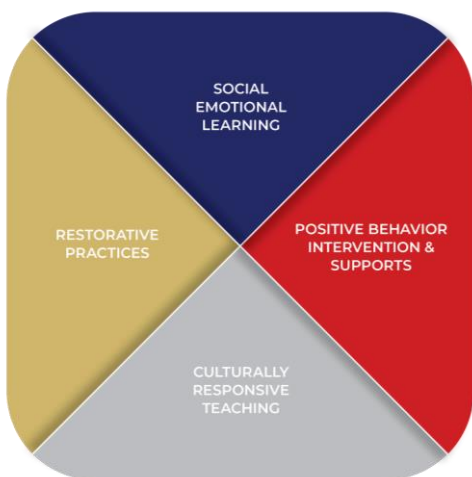


Figure 2.6

Components of the Culture of Learning Principle



While the instructional resources included in the instructional vision were not new to the district, the implementation of this vision through an asset orientation would require a mindset shift toward a more positive approach to instruction. Many SSD leaders on the instructional vision task force, including myself, recognized that many aspects of our education system are rooted in deficit thinking (Valencia, 1997). Educators often see students as deficient when they do not learn in the same way or at the same rate as others, and overlook the strengths of these students, causing them to underutilize assets in the pursuit of student learning (Valencia, 2010). However, when school leaders engage in instructional leadership through an asset orientation, the strengths of teachers and students can be recognized and leveraged for learning. Thus, an asset orientation to implementing the instructional vision has the potential to support teachers

and students in developing a greater sense of efficacy, resulting in increased student learning and teacher satisfaction (Calabrese et al., 2007; Scott, & Armstrong, 2019).

In preparation for the 2021-2022 school year, the task force that developed the instructional vision in 2020 reconvened in the spring of 2021 with the majority of the same members. At this time, the team reflected on the prior year and embarked on the initial design stages of the 2021-2022 principal professional learning program, identifying which aspects of the district's instructional vision would be the focus of each quarter for the 2021-2022 school year (see Table 2.7). The task force developed these areas of focus as specific action steps that leaders and teachers could take to realize the broader instructional vision. To foster coherence, the quarterly focus areas were also aligned with the work of teams within a professional learning community.

Table 2.7

2021-2022 SSD Quarterly Focus Areas

Quarter	Instructional Focus
Yearlong	Acknowledging Students Positively for Exhibiting Appropriate Behaviors
Quarter 1	Communicating Clear Learning Targets & Success Criteria
Quarter 2	Checking for Understanding of Learning Targets
Quarters 3-4	Responding to Assessments Aligned to Learning Targets

When considering the innovation of *implementing the district's instructional vision through an asset orientation* in light of Roger's (1995) attributes of innovation, it is clear that there is a relative advantage to focusing on one coherent instructional vision, rather than

diverting attention toward several seemingly unrelated resources. Additionally, because this instructional vision draws from familiar resources, it is compatible with values, norms and perceived needs within the district. When innovations are too complex, they are more difficult to diffuse (Rogers, 1995), therefore the team chose to develop graphics to represent the complexities of high quality instruction in a simplified manner. To increase the trialability and observability of the instructional vision, teacher and student indicators were developed for each element of the vision, as well as each quarterly focus area, and these indicators were used within the principal professional learning program to support implementation.

Knowing that effective implementation of the instructional vision is not an isolated endeavor, the task force paired this priority with another evidence-based practice: strengthening professional learning communities. When collaborative teams work together, they can more effectively implement the instructional vision to realize high levels of learning for all students.

Strengthening Professional Learning Communities. Within the last decade, SSD educators had begun the process of becoming a Professional Learning Community (PLC) with a focus on developing a collaborative culture to foster learning and establishing teams focused on the four essential questions of a PLC (Dufour et. al., 2016):

1. What knowledge, skills, and dispositions should every student acquire as a result of this unit, this course, or this grade-level?
2. How will we know when each student has acquired the essential knowledge and skills?
3. How will we respond when some students do not learn it?
4. How can we extend the learning for students who are already proficient? (p. 36).

However, during the few years prior to 2020, these practices had started to wane. Although high levels of student achievement remained a priority within the district, less of an emphasis had been placed on sustaining a PLC culture as a way to foster high levels of achievement. While some school leaders continued to emphasize the importance of working in strong collaborative teams focused on student learning outcomes, in 2021, the collaborative PLC model was not widespread throughout the district. Recognizing the potential impact of a PLC culture on student learning, and building on prior district initiatives, the task force identified strengthening professional learning communities as a high-leverage innovation for the 2021-2022 school year.

However, while this innovation may have been familiar to many within the organization, as Fullan (2016) explains, “the large-scale development of PLCs is hard—very hard—because we are talking about changing culture” (p. 117). With this in mind, a specific time within each principal professional learning session was established to begin the work of shifting the mindset of leaders toward fostering a PLC culture throughout the district. During this time, to attend to the attributes of innovation (Rogers, 1995), we highlighted the advantages of working in collaborative teams rather than being isolated in private practice. Additionally, knowing that compatibility with the existing culture is necessary for implementation, we made connections between the collaborative model of the PLC and the desire within the organization for high levels of student achievement. To support educators with the complexity of working in a professional learning community, a team of district, school and teacher leaders worked together to develop a bank of collaborative team actions with examples and guides in alignment with the

instructional vision. Furthermore, these guides and resources increased the trialability and observability of the work of PLC teams, making the collaborative team actions explicit.

With a focus on developing a collaborative culture around the instructional vision with the aim of supporting high levels of learning for all students, conditions were prioritized to foster effective teaching and learning throughout the district. However, with new state English Language Arts standards being implemented in 2021-2022 for all kindergarten through second grade students and in seventh through twelfth grade intensive reading courses, and a full roll out of these standards to all students in 2022-2023, prioritizing high quality literacy instruction was identified as the third innovation within the principal professional learning program.

Fostering High Quality Literacy Instruction. In light of the new state standards, high quality literacy instruction was identified as the third district innovation. Although many SSD educators have been delivering effective literacy instruction for years, district literacy achievement data show that there is room for much needed improvement. With the adoption of new state standards, the FLDOE has placed an emphasis on taking a structured approach to literacy instruction, which is supported by a wealth of research evidence (Spear-Swerling, 2019). Spear-Swerling (2019) identifies the following key features of structured literacy instruction:

- (a) explicit, systematic, and sequential teaching of literacy at multiple levels— phonemes, letter–sound relationships, syllable patterns, morphemes, vocabulary, sentence structure, paragraph structure, and text structure; (b) cumulative practice and ongoing review; (c) a

high level of student– teacher interaction; (d) the use of carefully chosen examples and nonexamples; (e) decodable text; and (f) prompt, corrective feedback. (p. 2).

To support this transition to new standards and a more structured and intentional approach to literacy instruction, *fostering high quality literacy instruction* was identified as a relevant innovation to include in the principal professional learning program for the 2021-2022 school year. There is an evidenced-based advantage for using a structured approach to literacy instruction over more traditional models, and this innovation is compatible with the district’s desire for high achievement and aligns with the new state standards. Additionally, new standards-aligned curriculum resources were adopted to support a structured literacy instructional approach, which further increases the relative advantage of this innovation (Rogers, 1995). To make the complexity of high quality literacy instruction more attainable, individual instructional practices were explored in manageable chunks during initial implementation, and the use of the aligned curriculum resources supported the trialability and observability of this innovation.

During the initial development of the 2021-2022 SSD principal professional learning program, the team of district and school-based leaders put much thought and consideration into identifying the most effective and suitable district priorities for the yearlong principal learning program to lead second order change in a way that seemed more first order (Durand et. al., 2016; Marzano & Waters, 2009). With the aim of fostering successful implementation, this task force was careful to select innovations that were both advantageous for student learning and compatible with the culture and values of the district. They selected innovations with an appropriate level of complexity, and also developed resources to support the trialability and

observability (Rogers, 1995). However, within a change context, carefully identifying even the most compelling and relevant innovations is not enough to guarantee change (Ellsworth, 2000). The interaction among all key players in a change context can influence the degree of change, and every one of these interactions takes place within the learning environment of a professional learning context. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the conditions of the learning environment in order to facilitate meaningful change.

Learning Environment

The second key player of change is the environment, which is influenced by Ely's eight environmental conditions of change: (a) dissatisfaction with the status quo, (b) knowledge and skills exists, (c) resources are available, (d) time is available, (e) rewards or incentives exist for participants, (f) participation is expected and encouraged, (g) commitment by those who are involved (Ellsworth, 2000, p. 76). In a professional learning context, the conditions of the *learning environment* can be cultivated by a variety of factors, but one significant aspect of the learning environment in a professional learning context is that these conditions can be shaped, to some extent, by the change facilitators. When designing the SSD principal professional learning program, to create a learning environment conducive to change, district and school-based leaders collectively identified learning priorities that built on the existing knowledge and skills of principals and that appealed to current dissatisfactions. After identifying these priorities, these leaders worked together to design the overall structure of the program given the current resources and time available within the organization in order to maximize the development of professional capital and ultimately lead to transformative learning (Ellsworth, 2000; Fullan, 2016; Mezirow, 2000). Throughout the year, district leaders collaboratively designed the details of each session

in response to feedback from school-based leaders, which fostered a commitment to learning. In my role as Supervisor of Professional Learning, I was a leader in the collaborative design process and sought to align the learning environment with the conditions of effective professional learning expressed in the literature.

The report *Effective Teacher Professional Development* outlines seven key features of effective professional learning (Darling-Hammond et. al., 2017). In this report, Darling-Hammond et. al. (2017) explain that effective professional development: (a) is content focused, (b) incorporates active learning, (c) supports collaboration, (d) uses models of effective practice, (e) provides coaching and expert support, (f) offers feedback and reflection, and (g) is of sustained duration (pp. v-vi). These key features of effective professional development encompass nearly all the core features set forth by Desimone (2009), in her proposed core conceptual framework for studying the effects of professional development on teachers and students. Desimone (2009) articulates the following core features: (a) content focus, (b) active learning, (c) coherence, (d) duration, (e) collective participation (p. 185). The only core feature of Desimone's (2009) framework that is not explicitly stated in Darling-Hammond's seven key features is coherence. These essential features of professional learning served as a guide for the design and facilitation of each session, although each key feature was not represented equally in the program. While some features played a prominent role in the program design (active learning, collaboration, coherence) other features were minimally addressed (coaching and expert support, feedback and reflection) due to the lack of access to available resources, such as

personnel and time. Table 2.8 provides examples of how each of these key features was included in the principal professional learning program.

Table 2.8

Effective Professional Learning Features in the SSD Principal Professional Learning Program

Feature	Principal Professional Learning Program Design Elements
Content focused	A focus on the three professional learning priorities (innovations) in a way that fostered the leadership skills and behaviors that result in improved outcomes for students and schools (Grissom et. al., 2021).
Active Learning	Frequent opportunities for discussion and sharing; Expected implementation after each session and reflection on impact at the following session
Collaboration/Collective Participation	Principal Professional Learning Teams grouped according to a common grade level and content area focus to learn ways to support specific teacher professional learning community teams
Models of Effective Practice	Videos and documents providing examples of effective teaching practice and leadership practices
Coaching and Expert Support	Individualized feedback and support was provided for principals who sought it
Feedback and Reflection	Structured opportunities for leaders to reflect on implementation artifacts and data to inform leadership decisions
Sustained Duration	Seven sessions were held throughout the 2021-2022 school year
Coherence	Explicit connections made between the professional learning priorities and effective leadership skills and behaviors to foster relevance and implementation

It is important to note that these key features describe effective professional learning for *teachers*, but the audience of the SSD professional learning program is *principals*. Currently, there is little research on principal professional learning (Darling-Hammond et. al., 2007),

however, the available studies show that many of these key features also hold true for principals, including the collaborative (Darling-Hammond et. al., 2007; Ikemoto et. al., 2014; Umekubo et. al, 2015), job-embedded (Aguilar et. al., 2011; Darling-Hammond et. al., 2007; Ikemoto et. al., 2014; Zepeda, 2014) and ongoing nature with opportunities for continuous assessment and adjustment in response to the needs of principals (Ikemoto et. al., 2014; Zepeda, 2014).

Furthermore, in light of this lack of research, this study will contribute to the growing body of research on effective professional learning for principals.

While attending to these key features, the learning environment was structured to provide principals the opportunity to develop knowledge *for* practice, knowledge *in* practice, and knowledge *of* practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). One of Ely's conditions of change is the level of knowledge and skills within the change environment (Ellsworth, 2000), and all three types of knowledge— knowledge *for*-, knowledge *in*-, and knowledge *of* practice—can influence the degree to which an individual can lead change within themselves. To develop knowledge *for* practice within the professional learning program, principals read articles and engaged in discussions about effective leadership practices in relation to the three district priorities. To develop knowledge *in* practice, principals participated in professional learning teams using the same structures as teachers, providing principals with experiences in collaborative teams similar to the experiences of the teachers in their schools. By experiencing a structure of team-led professional learning similar to that of teachers, principals had an opportunity to learn through collaborative experiences in a team with other principals and draw from these personal experiences to lead change more effectively within themselves and among the teacher teams at their schools. Additionally, after each principal professional learning team met, principals were

given an opportunity within the session to reflect on their team's discussion and define next steps for supporting teacher teams within their school. As part of this ongoing learning experience, principals were asked to bring artifacts resulting from their work with teacher teams to the following meeting to serve as a focus of conversation and learning in the next session. While the potential for the development of knowledge *in* practice is minimal in a professional learning setting, including structures that allow for implementation between sessions shows an understanding that developing knowledge *in* practice is important for change. Finally, knowledge *of* practice was developed through ongoing reflection opportunities in each session where principals discussed the outcomes of implementation and used these reflections to inform leadership decisions for supporting the three district priorities. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) explain that knowledge *of* practice is "constructed in the context of use, intimately connected to the knower, and, although relevant to immediate situations, also inevitably a process of theorizing" (p. 273). Through ongoing and coherent learning opportunities across all seven sessions, principals developed their knowledge *of* practice by engaging in and reflecting on their support for teachers around the three district priorities, and through these opportunities for reflection, conditions were set to foster the transformative change process where principals could lead themselves in changing their beliefs and practices based on the theories they developed through these reflective learning experiences. In light of Ely's environmental conditions of change (Ellsworth, 2000), the structures established within the professional learning environment created conditions to support principals in developing multiple facets of knowledge to inform their personal change. Furthermore, this knowledge development about the three district

priorities had the potential to incentivize, or motivate, principals to engage in the change process as this new knowledge of the innovations revealed potential benefits for teaching and learning.

The learning environment within a professional learning context plays an influential role in the outcomes of a professional learning program (Ellsworth, 2000; Fullan, 2016). Although it is described as its own key player in the conceptual framework, it is influenced by myriad factors, including the other key players. Even with its inherent complexity, the learning environment can be significantly influenced by the change facilitator to create conditions conducive to change.

Change Facilitator

The third key player of change is the change facilitator (Ellsworth, 2000). Within a professional learning context, the change facilitator has the responsibility of creating conditions conducive to change, not only through the change environment, but also through their interactions with the innovation and the learning agents. Fullan's (2008) *Six Secrets of Change* (see Table 2) provide guidance for ways that change facilitators can interact with learning agents in a meaningful way that results in positive outcomes for both.

Within the SSD principal professional learning program, the change facilitators demonstrate "love your employees" by investing in the skill development of principals (learning agents) in a way that encourages them to achieve their own goals as they also work towards the goals of the organization (Fullan, 2008). By providing opportunities for principal voice and choice in the learning experiences, autonomy was honored as principals constructed their own meaning during the professional learning experiences through reflection and collaborative discussions. The change facilitators "connect[ed] peers with purpose" by providing practical and

relevant learning experiences around the leadership skills and practices that are directly connected to improved school and student outcomes (Grissom et. al., 2021), and demonstrate that “capacity building prevails” by engaging both district leaders and school leaders in the design and development of the principal professional learning program so that the capacity of all within the organization can develop (Fullan, 2008). Furthermore, the implementation of a yearlong professional learning program for principals around the district priorities demonstrates that “learning is the work” (Fullan, 2008), as a capacity building approach to organizational change was prioritized (Fullan, 2015). During the program, change facilitators modeled a mindset of continuous improvement for all within the organization by using multiple data sources to inform decision making and next steps, which models the belief that “transparency rules” and supports the ultimate aim of the principal professional learning program, which is that the “system learns” in response to the intensifying context of change (Fullan, 2008). All in all, the change facilitators within a professional learning program have a significant responsibility to cultivate conditions for change so that the learning agents can lead themselves in the change process, and this is a responsibility that I do not take lightly. As Fullan (2008) explains, “the potential benefits from [the six secrets of change] approach are unlimited. When people learn from each other, everyone can gain without taking away from others” (p. 128). While it may be obvious that in a professional learning context, the learning agents learn from the change facilitators, it is important to note that the change facilitators can learn just as much from change agents through their feedback and input on the professional learning experience.

To learn from the outcomes of professional learning experiences, change facilitators can conduct evaluations. Guskey (2000) defines five critical levels of professional development

evaluation: (a) level 1- participants' reactions, (b) level 2- participants' learning, (c) level 3- organization support and change, (d) level 4- participants' use of new knowledge and skills, and (e) level 5- student learning outcomes. During this program, participants' reactions were solicited (level 1 evaluation) and used to inform specific details of the session design and facilitation. For example, after conducting a mid-year survey on the principals' perceptions of the professional learning program, I learned that some principals were struggling to find meaning in their principal professional learning teams because the teacher teams at their school were not yet using the types of artifacts that principals were asked to bring to each session. After becoming aware of this barrier to learning, I acknowledged this reality during the next meeting and explained how principals could continue to engage in learning to strengthen the work of professional learning community teams within their school by adapting the protocol to allow for the discussion of ways to support teams with the initial stages of their collaborative work. In addition to evaluating participants' reactions, data on organization support and change (level 3 evaluation) was also reviewed at each meeting through the walkthrough dashboards. The district walkthrough dashboard provides an overview of the number of classroom walkthroughs and the frequency of observation of each element of the instructional vision. Each month, we reviewed the number of walkthroughs districtwide and the implementation of the quarterly focus areas (listed in Table 7) followed by discussions about the factors that contributed to the current level of implementation and steps we could take to continue to increase the level of implementation within schools and throughout the district. In addition to the district walkthrough dashboard, each school has a school-specific walkthrough dashboard with their school's data. Within the sessions, principals had opportunities to compare their school's walkthrough data with the

district walkthrough data and reflect on their level of support for teachers to plan for next steps. Through this comparison, principals with higher levels of implementation had a chance to share ideas for success during session discussions, and principals looking to improve implementation could ask questions and get support from others working toward the same goal. Furthermore, in addition to informing next steps for principals, these dashboards provided valuable program evaluation data for the change facilitators by showing the degree to which these innovations were being incorporated into changing instructional practices throughout the district.

The change facilitators within a professional learning context play a pivotal role in creating conditions for change. By creating conditions that inspire change through a mindset of respect and high expectations while engaging with the learning agents in meaningful work, and monitoring progress along the way to make adjustments to best support the learning agents, change facilitators can bolster the change process (Guskey, 2000; Fullan, 2008).

Learning Agent

The fourth key player of change is the learning agent (Ellsworth, 2000). Learning agents are the central focus of an effective professional learning context, as the other key players interact to support the learning agents transformation as they lead themselves through change. Therefore, understanding how the learning agent experiences professional learning illuminates the barriers and facilitators to effective personal change, and can provide valuable insight into the design and facilitation of effective professional learning programs. To understand how learning agents engage in personal change, it can be helpful to attend to the literature on the Concerns Based Adoption Model (Ellsworth, 2000), dispositions toward change (Kern & Graber,

2017) and potential barriers to change (Ellsworth, 2000). In the following paragraphs, I will describe how each played out in the context of the SSD principal professional learning program. Ellsworth (2000) describes the Concerns- Based Adoption Model (CBAM) as “a powerful framework for assessing and tracking change’s progress at the level of the individual adopter, where success is ultimately determined” (p. 158). Two dimensions of the CBAM include the *Stages of Concern* (see Table 2.9) and the *Levels of Use* (see Table 2.10), which can be used to describe the degree of change experienced by the learning agent. According to Ellsworth (2000), the “Stages of Concern describes feelings and affect, and Levels of Use describes behavior and action. Yet both provide metrics for the same change process across time, and therefore must be interrelated” (Ellsworth, 2000, p. 151). The Stages of Concern can be used to understand a learning agent's readiness for change and can guide the change facilitator in providing meaningful support based on the concerns of the learning agent. By attending to the Stages of Concern, the change facilitator prioritizes a capacity building approach to change by focusing on the development of the learning agents’ human capital (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2015; Fullan, 2015). Similarly, the Levels of Use provides evidence of the change process at the individual level and can be used to inform decisions about what types of support would likely be most beneficial for the learning agent based on their current level of innovation implementation.

Table 2.9*CBAM Stages of Concern*

Stage	Focus of Learning Agent's Concern
Stage 0- Awareness	"I am not concerned about the innovation."
Stage 1- Informational	"I would like to know more about it."
Stage 2- Personal	"How will using it affect me?"
Stage 3- Management	"Just using it is taking all of my time."
Stage 4- Consequence	"What effect is using it having on students' learning?"
Stage 5- Collaboration	"How might I integrate my use with other teachers' use?"
Stage 6- Refocusing	"I have some ideas about something that might work even better!"

Note. Adapted from *Surviving Change: A Survey of Educational Change Models*, by Ellsworth, J., 2000, p. 158.

Table 2.10*CBAM Levels of Use*

Level	Learning Agent's Implementation
Level 0- Non-use	"Neither using it nor taking any action to get involved"
Level 1- Orientation	"Learning what the innovation is all about"
Level 2- Preparation	"Getting ready to use the innovation for the first time"
Level 3- Mechanical	"Focused on the rote aspects of use, driven by own convenience"
Level 4a- Routine	"Use has stabilized and few if any changes are considered"
Level 4b- Refinement	"Changes are considered and made to improve learning outcomes"
Level 5- Integration	"Use is coordinated with colleagues to improve learning outcomes"
Level 6- Renewal	"Use is re-evaluated and new innovations examined for better options"

Note. Adapted from *Surviving Change: A Survey of Educational Change Models*, by Ellsworth, J., 2000, p. 159.

During the implementation of the SSD principal professional learning program, data were not collected to explicitly identify the Stages of Concern and Levels of Use. However, I can use these elements of the CBAM as heuristics within this study to understand how the learning agents experienced the professional learning program and how principals led themselves through the personal change process. Through this study, I will examine principals' changes in beliefs (stages of concern) and practices (levels of use) to gain a more comprehensive understanding of facilitating effective change through professional learning.

Another important dimension of the learning agent's experience in the professional learning program is their disposition toward change. In a study on teacher change, Kern and Graber (2017) identified the following dispositions as influential to the change process: (a) program satisfaction, (b) self-efficacy to change, and (c) willingness to change. While these dispositions were identified in a context of teacher change, not principal change, these researchers found that certain learning agent dispositions do, in fact, influence the change process. Therefore, knowing the potential of a learning agent's disposition to influence change provides a rationale for exploring how principal dispositions may influence changes in their beliefs and actions. While the desired dispositions serve as facilitators for change, some characteristics that the learning agents bring to the professional learning experiences may also present barriers to change.

A learning agent's resistance to change is a reality that must be considered and addressed within a professional learning context. While there are several steps that can be taken by the change facilitator to mitigate resistance, Ellsworth (2000) describes four types of barriers that may present themselves in a change context: (a) cultural, (b) social, (c) organizational, and (d)

psychological (p. 166). These four types of barriers were first identified by Zaltman and Duncan (1977) in *Strategies for Planned Change*. Table 2.11 describes these barriers based on Zaltman and Duncan's (1977) resistance framework.

Table 2.11

Barriers to Change

Type of Barrier	Description	Issues within this type of barrier
Cultural Barriers	there is a conflict between one's traditions and values and the innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Cultural values and beliefs-“The innovation is wrong.” -Cultural ethnocentrism- “My culture is superior-or the change [facilitator] thinks his is” -Saving Face- “I can't do that; I'd never live it down” -Incompatibility of a cultural trait with change- “It just won't work here because...”
Social Barriers	psychological factors of the group inhibit implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Group Solidarity- “I can't do this because it would be a hardship for my coworkers” -Rejection of outsiders- “Nobody who isn't 'one of us' could create something of value.” -Conformity to norms- “If I participated in this, I would be ostracized.” -Conflict- “There are too many factions here pulling in different directions.” -Group Introspection- “I'm too much a part of this group to see its problems objectively.”
Organizational Barriers	characteristics of the organization are in opposition to change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Threat to power and influence- “If we do this, I won't be as important anymore.” -Organizational structure- “This cuts across department lines and intrudes on their turf.” -Behavior of top-level administrators- “The boss isn't doing it, why should I?” -Climate for change in organization- “We don't need change, or couldn't if we tried.” -Technological barriers for resistance- “I can't understand this or apply it to my work.”

Psychological Barriers	traits and reactions of individuals that discourage change	-Perception- “My mind is made up: I just don’t see it the way you do.” -Homeostasis- “All this change is just too uncomfortable.” -Conformity and commitment- “This just isn’t the way people in my profession do things.” -Personality factors- “I can’t do this; it just isn’t right for who I am”
------------------------	--	---

Note. Adapted from *Surviving Change: A Survey of Educational Change Models*, by Ellsworth, J., 2000, p. 184-185.

When designing and facilitating the SSD principal professional learning program, the district leadership team took proactive steps to prevent many of these barriers, such as including principals in the design of the program and selecting innovations that fit within our organization’s cultural norms. Nonetheless, within the complexity of the interactions between the learning agent and the other key players in a professional learning context, there are many opportunities for barriers to emerge, thus an aim of this study is to explore these barriers in order to facilitate change more effectively through ongoing principal professional learning.

Understanding the experience of the learning agent in a professional learning context is central to leading effective change. The learning agent is central to the change process, and all other key players exist to support the learning agent's transformation. While I have described each of the key players separately, it is essential to understand that these key players do not exist in isolation from one another. It is through the interactions among these key players that a professional learning program evolves to foster change within individuals and the organization.

Interactions among the Key Players

Each of the four key players of change in a professional learning context interact in a way that enhances or detracts from the change experience (Ellsworth, 2000). The interdependence of

these key players contributes to the dynamics and complexity of a professional learning change environment, meaning that when the characteristics of one key player are adjusted, the rest of the change context will respond. For example the interaction between the innovation and the change facilitator can positively or negatively influence the way in which the innovation is discussed in the professional learning environment. If the change facilitator fully supports the innovation and has a deep understanding of the innovation's attributes, she can more effectively facilitate carefully structured learning experiences that allow the learning agents to develop a deeper understanding of the innovation, motivating learning agents to engage in personal change (Ellsworth, 2000; Fullan, 2016). On the flip side, if a change facilitator has only a partial, or surface level, understanding of the innovation, the learning experiences may be insufficient for the learning agent, creating an unintended barrier to transformation. Additionally, the interaction between the *change facilitator* and *learning agent*, has the potential to significantly influence the degree of personal change within a professional learning context. The better the change facilitators know the learning agents, both individually and as a group, the more effectively they can design and facilitate learning experiences that build on prior experiences and attend to the learning agents' beliefs and needs (Ellsworth, 2000; Fullan, 2008). This is why feedback is an essential part of the SSD theory of action. On the opposite end of the continuum, if there is a contentious relationship between the change facilitators and the learning agents, this may pose a significant barrier to personal and organizational change. Table 2.12 lists the interactions among these four key players paired with questions that can be used to consider the potential within each interaction to serve as facilitators or barriers to change in a professional learning context.

Table 2.12*Interactions Among Key Players in a Professional Learning Context*

Interaction	Potential Barriers and Facilitators
Innovation and Learning Environment	How does the innovation fit within the learning environment? What types of learning experiences are provided to support the innovation?
Innovation and Change Facilitator	What are the change facilitator's beliefs about the innovation? How well does the change facilitator understand the learning environment?
Innovation and Learning Agent	What are the learning agents' beliefs about the innovation? In what ways can the learning agents benefit from the innovation?
Change Facilitator and Learning Environment	How does the change facilitator structure the learning environment? What conditions for change are supported by the change facilitator?
Change Facilitator and Learning Agent	What is the relationship between the change facilitator and learning agent? What is the nature of the interactions between the change facilitator and learning agent?
Learning Agent and Learning Environment	How does the learning agent experience the learning environment? What conditions for change are experienced by the learning agent?

Because the individual characteristics of each key player are varied and diverse, the questions for considering potential barriers and facilitators are not comprehensive. Rather the questions posed about each interaction provide examples of the types of interactions that may show up as barriers or facilitators within a professional learning context. In this study, I will use questions similar to those posed here to better understand the interactions of the key players within the SSD principal

professional learning program to explore which barriers and facilitators were most influential within this unique context.

Chapter Summary

Principal professional learning is an essential element of the change process. Given the current state of change in Sunshine School District, district leaders recognized the value of developing and facilitating an ongoing principal professional learning program to provide opportunities for personal transformation as well as organizational change. SSD district leaders employed a theory of action that focused on a capacity building approach to leading change. By attending to each of the key players of change within a professional learning context—the innovation, the learning environment, the change facilitators, and the learning agents— district leaders used research- and evidence-based practices to inform the design and facilitation of the program. However, despite grounding the design in the literature, the degree of change among learning agents varies because each principal is a unique individual serving in a distinct context, and principals experience professional learning through their own specialized lens (Herrmann et. al., 2019; Patojoki et. al, 2021). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to understand how principals experience change within a principal professional learning program by exploring their unique and common facilitators and barriers to change in order to gain insight on the role of principal professional learning within a districtwide approach to leading change in educational systems as well as to identify critical connection points between professional learning and change.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Through my review of literature in Chapter 2, I identified a need for additional research in the area of professional learning for school principals. As the Supervisor of Professional learning in a district experiencing significant change, it is important for me to understand how school leaders experience professional learning in a change context, how they engage in personal transformational change, and how these changes in beliefs influence changes in their practices when leading organizational change within their schools. Furthermore, I sought to identify the relevant barriers and facilitators experienced by principals within the professional learning context in order to learn how to more effectively design and facilitate meaningful professional learning for school leaders.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do principals experience a yearlong professional learning program focused on implementing the district's instructional vision through an asset orientation, strengthening professional learning communities, and fostering high quality literacy instruction?
 - a. What changes in knowledge do principals identify in each area?
 - b. What changes in beliefs do principals identify in each area?
 - c. What changes in practices do principals identify in each area?
 - d. What barriers and facilitators to change do principals identify in each area?
2. What are the critical connection points between professional learning and change within the program?

To answer these questions, I used a qualitative research design to gain a more in depth and nuanced understanding of the experiences of SSD principals within the 2021-2022 yearlong professional learning program. Ravitch and Carl (2021) describe qualitative research as a “systematic and contextualized research [process] to interpret the ways that humans view, approach, and make meaning of their experiences, contexts and the world” (p. 4). Through the qualitative research process, I had an opportunity to explore the principals’ perceptions of their changes in beliefs and practices as a result of their participation in the principal professional learning program. I also gained insight into the barriers and facilitators that these principals believe to have influenced that change. Knowing that there are “multiple, situated truths and perspectives” (Ravitch & Carl, p. 5) based on myriad factors within a professional learning context, I explored the experiences of SSD principals who have demonstrated an effort to engage in personal transformation to lead change within their schools.

Research Design

I used a qualitative case study design (Yin, 2018) to study the experiences of principals in a yearlong principal professional learning program. When designing this case study, I coupled the structural elements of Yin’s (2018) case study research methods with the respectful approach to qualitative research explained by Ravitch and Carl (2021). Yin (2018) defines a case study as, “an empirical method that: (a) investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when (b) the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (p. 15). In this study, the change process is intertwined with, and emerges from, the interactions among the key players in a professional learning context, making it difficult to distinguish the boundaries between the change process itself and its

occurrence within the context of professional learning. Additionally, I explored principals' experiences with personal change and how this internal transformation influenced how they lead organizational change within their schools after participating in a yearlong professional learning program. I engaged with principals within their school setting to collect data through semi-structured interviews and reviewed documents generated during the professional learning program as well as throughout their daily work within their schools to gain insight into principals' experiences with the change process and to explore their barriers and facilitators to change. Inasmuch, a case study approach (Yin, 2018) allowed me to explore the bounded system of principals experiences in the 2021-2022 SSD Principal Professional Learning Program to help make sense of the role of professional learning in the change process within a unique district context. Yin (2018) explains that case studies are appropriate for answering questions that ask "how?" and "why?" about contemporary events over which the researcher has no control. While I played a role in the design and facilitation of the principal professional learning program, the "control" I had over the event was in the planning and implementation stages of the program. I assumed the role of researcher *after* the program was completed, and therefore did not have control to change past events. Instead, while in the role of researcher, I focused on understanding the perceptions and experiences of principals within the professional learning program and how their change outcomes were facilitated or impeded.

Case study design is a research approach that has been used by educational researchers to explore bounded systems, such as professional learning experiences (Yin, 2018). Cameron, Mercier and Doolittle (2016) used a case study design to explore how physical education teachers experienced change in alignment with Fullan's (2007) change framework. Similarly, I

used a case study approach to explore how principals experienced personal change in a professional learning program in alignment with change literature. Additionally, Cutrer-Párraga et. al. (2021) used a case study approach to explore how resistant teachers worked with a literacy coach, which is another professional learning model intended to support change. In their study, both the coaches and the teachers participated in workshop-style professional learning experiences prior to the initiation of the data collection for the case study. Likewise, in this case study, principals participated in a yearlong professional learning program prior to my collection of data through interviews and document analyses. Although I focused on principals rather than teachers in this research, a case study approach allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of principals' experiences with change through professional learning.

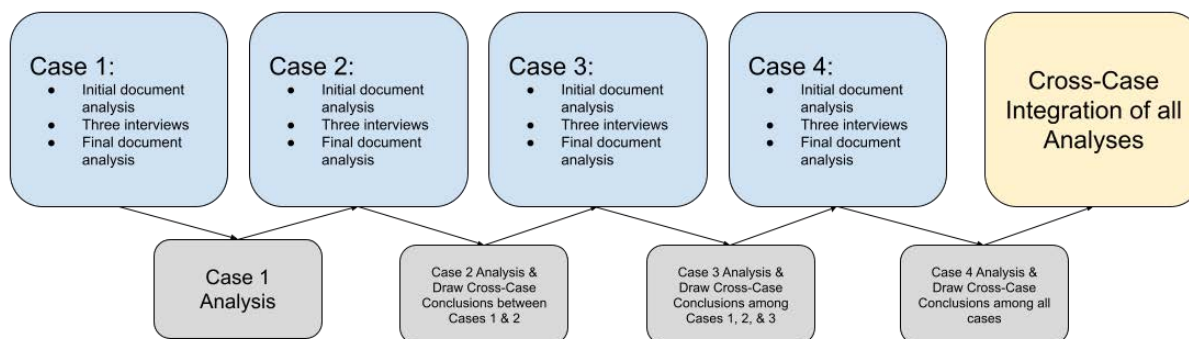
To garner insight into the experiences of individual principals, as well as gain insight into their collective experiences across cases, I used a multiple-case study design (Yin, 2018). While acknowledging that some fields may consider single-case studies and multiple-case studies as distinctly different methodologies, Yin (2018) sees them as “variants within the same methodological framework...with both being included as a part of case study research” (p. 54). However, Yin (2018) explains that “multiple-case study designs have distinct advantages and disadvantages in comparison with single-case study designs. The evidence from multiple cases is often considered more compelling, and the overall multiple-case study is therefore regarded as being more robust” (p. 54). Acknowledging Yin's (2018) statement that multiple case study design can “require extensive resources and time beyond the means of a single student or independent research investigator” (p. 54), I considered this disadvantage, yet found the benefits

of exploring the experiences of more than one principal to be worth the investment of additional time and resources.

Using Yin's (2018) definition of case study research, I explored how four principals experienced change within a professional learning program. In this study, each principal represents a unique case within the same professional learning context. I collected evidence for each case following a data collection protocol that includes two opportunities for document analysis and a series of three interviews with each of the four principals (Yin, 2018). The data collection protocol for this study can be found in Appendix C. For each case, I conducted an initial document analysis to inform probe development for three subsequent interviews. After the interviews, I conducted a final document analysis for data triangulation. I explain this process more in depth in the data collection section. After collecting the data for each case, I analyzed the findings of that case and used replication logic after each subsequent case to conduct cross case analysis (Yin, 2018). Upon completion of all four case studies, described in Chapter 4, I conducted an integrated cross-case analysis of all cases described in Chapter 5. The overall design of this multi-case study is shown in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1

Multi-Case Study Design



Understanding the unique experiences of four different principals in a professional learning program provides valuable insights into the barriers and facilitators to personal change. By analyzing multiple cases within the same bounded system, I identified more robust findings to inform the design and facilitation of meaningful principal professional learning within a context of change (Yin, 2018).

Participant Selection

To identify the four participants for this study, I engaged in purposeful sampling (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). When using purposeful sampling, participants are intentionally selected based on their desired characteristics. Ravitch and Carl (2021) explain that “qualitative researchers tend to deliberately select individuals because of their unique ability to answer a study’s research questions” (p. 83). In this study I selected four principals who actively participated in the yearlong principal professional learning program and demonstrated an effort to facilitate personal change within themselves and lead organizational change within their schools through their engagement in two or more of the following actions: (a) actively participating in the professional learning sessions through discussion and reflection opportunities, (b) serving on the district professional learning planning team, (c) offering constructive feedback on district priorities and professional learning practices, (d) sharing examples of successful implementation in their schools, (e) asking questions to get input on implementing change within their schools, and (f) supporting other principals with leading change. The evidence of engagement by participants is shown in Table 3.1. To explore potential differences between elementary and secondary principals, I intentionally selected two elementary and two secondary principals, as

shown in Table 3.2. I also selected male and female principals from schools of varying socioeconomic levels.

Table 3.1

Case Study Participants- Evidence of Engagement

Action	Arthur	Holbrock	Matthews	Oliver
actively participating in the professional learning sessions through discussion and reflection opportunities	yes	yes	yes	yes
serving on the district professional learning planning team	no	no	yes	yes
offering constructive feedback on district priorities and professional learning practices	yes	yes	yes	yes
sharing examples of successful implementation in their schools	yes	yes	yes	yes
asking questions to get input on implementing change within their schools	yes	yes	yes	yes
supporting other principals with leading change	no	no	yes	yes

Table 3.2

Case Study Participant Demographics

Total	School Level	Percentage of Students Receiving Free or Reduced Meals	Gender
Arthur	Secondary	52%	Male
Holbrock	Elementary	76%	Female
Matthews	Secondary	43%	Female

Oliver	Elementary	44%	Female
--------	------------	-----	--------

Note. Percentage of students receiving free and reduced meals was obtained from FDOE Edstats. According to Ravitch and Carl (2021), “purposeful sampling provides context-rich and detailed accounts of specific populations and locations” (p. 83). The elementary and secondary principals I selected represent significant cases (Yin, 2008), providing insight into the professional learning experiences of four SSD principals most actively engaged in personal and organizational change.

Data Collection

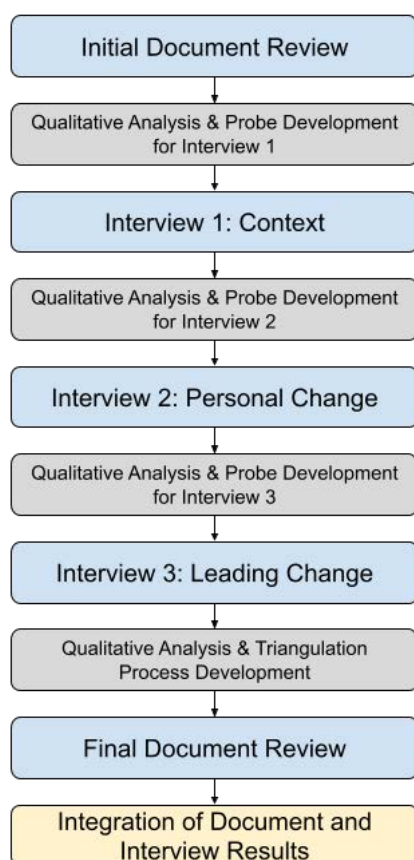
After identifying the participants in this multi-case study, and obtaining informed consent from each one, I collected data from multiple documents and conducted interviews in each of four cases (Yin, 2018). After collecting data from each individual case, I integrated the data from all four cases into a cross-case analysis. Figure 3.1 shows the overall multi-case design of this study. Ravitch and Carl (2021) explain that “in qualitative research, the *choice and sequencing of methods* are vital to the validity of a study” (p. 93). I intentionally selected and sequenced these methods to gain a deep understanding of each case being explored, and was responsive to each principal’s unique context as I explored each case in depth.

To guide the data collection process within each of the four cases, I used the Multi-Case Study Data Collection Protocol shown in Appendix C. This protocol allowed for replication logic to be used across cases (Yin, 2018). I studied one case at a time following the steps outlined in the protocol to deeply explore each principal’s unique experience, and after each subsequent case, I drew cross-case conclusions using replication logic, as shown in the example in Table 3.8 (Yin, 2018). For each individual case, I conducted an initial document analysis to inform the interview probes used to supplement the main questions in the interview (Rubin &

Rubin, 2012). I then conducted a series of three interviews, which I adapted from Seidman’s (2006) three interview structure to fit within the context of this case study design, and concluded each individual case study with a final document analysis for triangulation, which Ravitch and Carl (2021) describe as “the strategic juxtaposition of multiple data sources to achieve greater rigor and validity in a study” (p. 93). Figure 3.2 illustrates the data collection process for each individual case.

Figure 3.2

Data Collection for Individual Cases



Wolcott (1994) states that “everything has the potential to be data, but nothing becomes data without the intervention of a researcher, who takes note—and often makes note— of some things

to the exclusion of others” (pp. 3-4). Within each case, through multiple rounds of data collection using multiple forms of data, I gained insight into each principal’s experience with change during the professional learning program. Through the sequence of interviews, I explored the principals’ perceptions of change and learned more about the perceived barriers and facilitators within the program. Through the documents, I noticed evidence of how these changes have been enacted in each unique context.

During the initial document review, I reviewed three different types of documents to inform the development of interview probes: (a) walkthrough logs, (b) entries in the professional learning community (PLC) reflection journal, and (c) Principal PLC team agendas. These documents are naturally occurring documents that were used throughout the principal professional learning program and also reflect how principals supported change within their schools (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Principals use the walkthrough logs regularly within their schools to take note of the teacher and student actions that are observed during each short classroom visit. These walkthrough logs were also reviewed and discussed during the principal professional learning sessions. After completing a classroom walkthrough, the data from the walkthrough log is compiled into a “data dashboard” for school leaders to see in aggregate and can be used to make data-informed instructional leadership decisions. The data within the walkthrough dashboard can also be filtered by conditions, such as teacher, subject, date, etc. to inform decisions about more targeted support within each school. The walkthrough notes entered into the log after each classroom visit are emailed directly to the teacher so they are aware of what the school leader noticed while visiting their classroom. These walkthrough notes often include comments about what the teachers and students are doing and may also include

ideas for next steps. When looking at the walkthrough logs, I looked for evidence of change in walkthrough frequency, the content of walkthrough feedback, and evidence of change in teacher practice. Reviewing the walkthrough logs through this lens, provided insight into changes in both principal and teacher practice, and allowed me to develop specific probing questions unique to each principal's context. Table 3.3 provides an example of the walkthrough frequency data of one principal. To illustrate the change in teacher practice, Table 3.4 provides an example of walkthrough implementation data by month, and Figure 3.3 shows the corresponding graph with trendline. In response to this data,

Table 3.3

Principal Arthur's Walkthrough Data- Frequency

Month	Instructional days	Walkthroughs	Walkthroughs per instructional day
August	16	25	1.56
September	21	79	3.76
October	20	38	1.90
November	16	45	2.81
December	13	32	2.46
January	19	26	1.37
February	19	60	3.16
March	17	33	1.94
April	19	24	1.26

Table 3.4

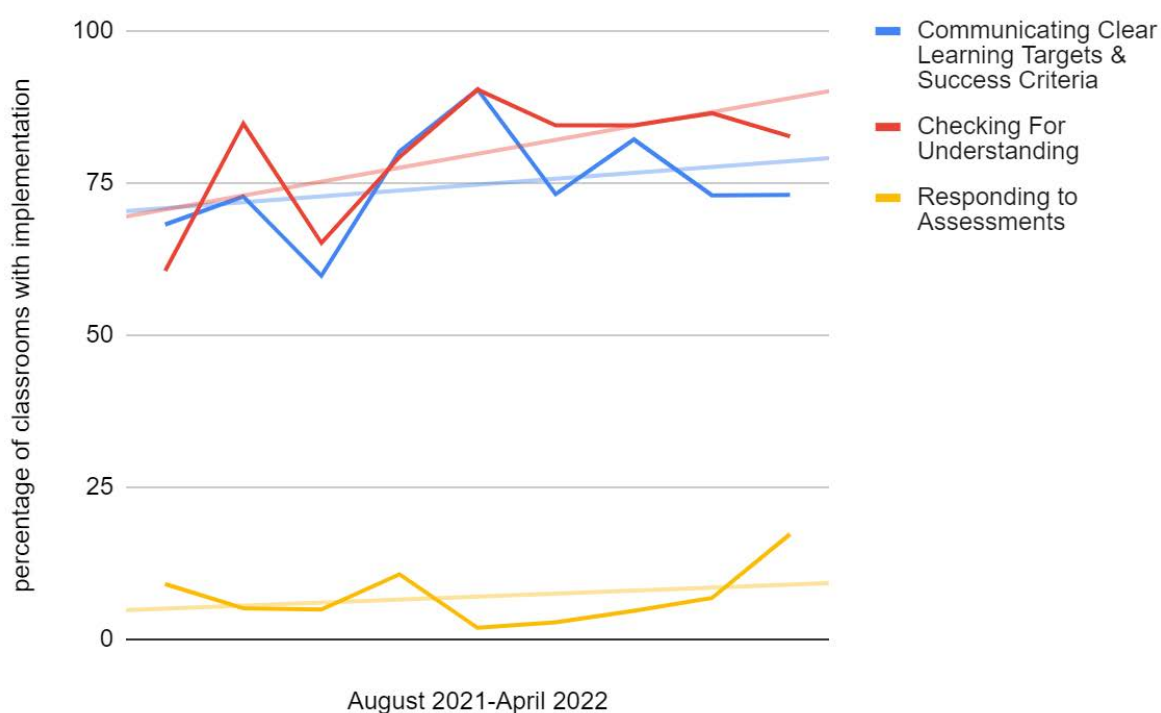
Principal Arthur's Walkthrough Data- Implementation

Month	Communicating Clear Learning Targets & Success Criteria	Checking For Understanding	Responding to Assessments
August	68.2%	60.6%	9.1%

September	72.8%	84.8%	5.1%
October	59.8%	65.2%	4.9%
November	80.2%	79.3%	10.7%
December	90.4%	90.4%	1.9%
January	73.2%	84.5%	2.8%
February	82.2%	84.5%	4.7%
March	73%	86.5%	6.8%
April	73.1%	82.7%	17.3%

Figure 3.3

Principal Arthur's Walkthrough Data



The second type of document I analyzed are the entries in the PLC reflection journals. During each professional learning session, after each Principal PLC team meeting, principals had time to reflect on what they learned during the discussion and what next steps they planned to take to support a teacher PLC team back at their school. Reviewing the data from the PLC

reflection journal provided insight into what the principals learned and what practices they planned to use when supporting the PLC teams within their schools. When reviewing the PLC leadership journal, I took note of what principals took away from the Principal PLC team meetings, the next steps principals identified to support their PLC teams, and evidence of changing beliefs or practices across their multiple journal entries throughout the program. This data was triangulated with the walkthrough log data to see how the next steps for supporting teachers may have translated into changing teacher practice within their schools.

The third type of document I analyzed is the Principal PLC team agenda notes. District developed Principal PLC team agendas were used by principals during each PLC team meeting portion of every session. The agendas for each meeting are included in Appendix B. Although the agendas were developed by the district, many Principal PLC teams took notes on their agendas to reflect ideas and questions from their discussions, therefore, these agendas can provide insight into the principals' conversations during their PLC team meetings, and have the potential to include evidence of their knowledge, beliefs, and practices. Furthermore, by comparing notes across multiple sessions throughout the year, changes in knowledge, beliefs, and practice may surface.

As Ravitch and Carl (2021) explain, these naturally occurring documents are “an important source of context and history that can help us, as researchers, understand the complexities of what we study better by providing a form of data triangulation to first-person accounts” (p. 151). The data collected during this initial document review informed the development of the interview probes to supplement the main interview questions during the principal interviews (Rubin and Rubin, 2012). For example, when reviewing Principal Arthur's

walkthrough log data, some of which is represented in Tables 3.3 and 3.4 and Figure 3.3, I noticed that much of his written feedback was focused on recognizing the way that teachers were using learning targets effectively in their classrooms, showing strong evidence of implementing the district’s vision through an asset orientation. However, when reviewing his PLC Leadership Journal and the Principal PLC Team Agenda and notes, there was much less evidence of engagement and implementation. Therefore, I knew that I needed to gain more insight into his experience with these two innovations to understand the reason for his differing levels of engagement. Therefore, I crafted the following interview probe for Principal Arthur’s first interviews: *Your walkthrough logs showed many walkthroughs focused on the OneClay vision with feedback provided through an asset orientation, but little evidence of participation in the PLC Leadership Journal and the digital PLC Team agenda. What led to this difference in engagement?* Table 3.5 provides an example of how the initial document analysis informed the probe development.

Table 3.5

Example of Document Analysis and Probe Development

Document	Analysis
Walkthrough Logs	<p>Consistent and frequent, with an increase in February, which is evaluation season</p> <p>Feedback includes elements of the focus areas and describes student and teacher actions, with next steps formulates as questions and specific positive praise focused on what is going well.</p>
PLC Leadership Journal	<p>Entries in 2 out of 6 months</p> <p>Recognizes the value of building relationships with students and parents to gain insight into how to best meet students’ individual learning needs</p>

Principal PLC Team Agenda Notes	no notes on the digital agendas
Probe Developed After Analysis	“Your walkthrough logs showed many walkthroughs focused on the district vision with feedback provided through an asset orientation, but little evidence of participation in the PLC Leadership Journal and the digital PLC Team agenda. What led to this difference in engagement?”

After reviewing these documents, and using this initial understanding of the principals’ knowledge, beliefs, and practices to develop probes for the series of three semi-structured interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2012), I conducted the interviews at each principal’s school to engage with the principals in their real-world context (Yin, 2018). I scheduled the interviews at a time that was convenient for them within a given two-week time frame, in the privacy of their office. Although the need did not arise, I proactively outlined a recommended process for rescheduling within the Multi-Case Study Data Collection Protocol in Appendix C. I sought consent to record each interview using a voice recording and transcription application, and also took notes during the interviews. After each interview, I reviewed the transcription for accuracy, and made adjustments as needed before analyzing the data.

I adapted the three-interview structure developed for this study from Seidman’s (2006) three-interview structure used for in-depth phenomenological interviewing. Because this study focuses on principals’ experiences in a bounded system, it is a case study, rather than a phenomenological study (Yin, 2018), however, the three interview structure naturally lends itself to exploring the nature of change within a professional learning program. Similar to Seidman’s structure, each of three interviews had a distinct focus. In the first interview, I explored each principal’s unique context. This provided insight into each principal’s leadership knowledge,

beliefs and practices and also illuminated potential school-based barriers and facilitators to change. In the second interview, I focused on the personal changes of principals' beliefs and practices as a result of the principal professional learning program. The series of questions in this interview provided insight into principals' experiences with transformational learning (or lack thereof), effective professional learning design features, the principals' levels of concern with the district priorities, and the types of barriers and facilitators that they encountered within the program. In the third interview, I explored how principals have translated their change experiences within the professional learning program into leading changes within their schools. Because principals play a pivotal role in translating change initiated at the district level to the classroom, this final interview provided insight into barriers and facilitators to changing principal practice. This is an essential element of the change process, because although principals may perceive to have experienced changes in knowledge and beliefs within the professional learning setting (knowledge for practice), it is the enactment of these changes within their school (knowledge in practice) that truly makes a difference for the benefit of teachers and students (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). The main questions that I used in each interview are shown in the Multi-Case Study Data Collection Protocol in Appendix C. To supplement these main questions, I developed probes prior to each interview based on previous data collected through the initial document analysis and prior interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2012), using the process illustrated in example provided in Table 3.5.

After completing the initial document analysis and a series of three interviews, I engaged in a final document review of the same three documents reviewed during the initial review. However, in the final review, the focus was on identifying additional evidence within the

documents reflecting the changes in knowledge, beliefs, and practices that principals revealed during the interviews. By conducting a final document review in light of the interview data, I contextualized the interview findings. As Ravitch and Carl (2021) explain, “the review and triangulation of documents in relation to primary empirical data is essential to understanding the context in which the research happens” (p. 151).

Data Analysis

As I conducted this sequence of document reviews and interviews with each principal, I analyzed the data after each phase of collection. This iterative model of data analysis allowed me to gain an emerging understanding of the principals’ experiences in the professional learning program and informed subsequent data collection (Yin, 2018). For example, after the first round of document analysis, I developed probing questions unique to each principal’s context, as this was the focus of the first interview. Table 3.5 illustrates this first round of probe development for Principals Arthur. After analyzing the data from the first interview focused on the principal’s unique context, I developed additional probes for the second interview related to the principal’s personal change experience. During the first interview, Mr. Arthur shared that collaboration with other principals was a significant source of learning in the program. However, because there was less evidence of engagement in the PLC Leadership Journal and the digital PLC Team agenda, I developed two additional probing questions for the second interview to learn more about his personal change experience during the PLC time: (a) *I noticed that the high school principals did not engage during the PLC time. What do you think were the barriers to this engagement?* and (b) *If you were in teams with different principals, for example in feeder patterns, do you think the engagement would have been different?* In the third interview focused

on leading change, questions two and four were specifically designed to probe more deeply into information previously shared in the first and second interviews about each principals context and personal change experience, and question three was designed to probe more deeply into the changes in teacher practice noticed in the walkthrough logs (see the Multi-Case Study Data Collection Protocol in Appendix C).

During each analysis phase of this multi-case study, I analyzed the documents and interview transcripts through initial coding, followed by axial coding to identify categories and themes (Saldana, 2021). While coding, although I did not use a priori codes, I remained attuned to the professional learning and change literature in order to identify examples of alignment and possible misalignment between the findings and the literature (Yin, 2018). After making initial sense of the data through an initial round of open coding, I engaged in a second round of axial coding, where I sorted the initial codes into the concepts being explored by the research questions. I then reviewed the codes in each category, “playing” with and studying the relationships among these codes and categories, to identify meaningful patterns and emerging higher-order concepts to develop themes (Yin, 2018). Saldana (2021) defines themes as “a phrase or sentence describing more subtle and tacit processes” (p. 19). Tables 3.6 and 3.7 provide examples of how I moved from initial coding to the development of themes.

Table 3.6

Example of Initial Coding

Transcript Excerpt	Initial Code(s)
It’s the culture of our school that we’re, you know, we have high expectations. I’m glad that we’re kind of mapping out those high expectations. Because we talked about how we have high expectations, but what does that actually mean?	High Expectations Clarity

I think I am much more open. I want to know everyone's opinion on something. I don't want to just make a decision with it and then have to come in and explain it. I want to know what do you think I really want to have that input.	Collective mission and vision Shared decision making
I want to build a culture at this school that is going to grow, that we can be the number one school in the district. That's my goal for this school. That our kids come through here having a great high school experience, where they're able to enlist, enroll, or become gainfully employed for every kid where they have the ultimate high school experience with those connections and are being challenged.	Student achievement Culture of connection and learning

Table 3.7*Example of Axial Coding and Theme Development*

Initial Codes	Axial Code	Theme
High Expectations Clarity Collective mission and vision Shared decision making Student achievement Culture of connection and learning	Beliefs	Growing beliefs in a more collaborative leadership model of shared decision making to help students meet high expectations

I engaged in this exploration of the data, codes, and categories iteratively within each new case, and made connections across subsequent cases as seen in Table 3.8 (Yin, 2018). After I interpreted the findings and developed themes related to the changes, barriers, and/or facilitators identified within the data, I provided context by describing the professional learning design elements and facilitation moves related to the findings and themes, connecting to literature that supports these findings and, when appropriate, making connections to my

positionality and how it may have influenced the findings and themes within this study (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Table 3.8

Example of Replication Logic

	Transcript Excerpt	Code	Cross-Case Integration
Case 1	“I think I was able to get more insight from other schools”	learning from others	
Case 2	“It's always helpful to me to listen to my colleagues”	learning from other's success	Principals learned from each other during collaborative experiences throughout the program
Case 3	“I also really love the opportunities to just talk with my colleagues”	principal collaboration	
Case 4	“[The sessions] were very conversational...and that helped my instructional leadership.”	principal collaboration	

It should also be noted that as a co-designer and co-facilitator, I played a role similar to that of a participant observer in this study. Boccagni and Schrooten (2018) describe participant observation as a research method with “an embodied and extended presence in the social world of those being studied. Social life as it is being lived, rather than only as it is reported by informants...is its fundamental concern” (p. 212). While I was not actively studying the sessions as they were occurring because I chose to study the participants' experience in the program after it occurred, I was not a true participant observer. However, I must acknowledge that my recollection of and participation in the experience presents a potential source of bias as well as a potential source of greater insight. My understanding and interpretation of the data during the analysis process was informed by my experience in the program, making the process of member

checking a necessary step in attending to the rigor of this study by taking steps to maximize the validity of the results.

Rigor

Ravitch and Carl (2021) state, “regardless of the approach used, validity in qualitative research can never be fully ensured; it is both a process and a goal” (p. 167). Nonetheless, I attended to the rigor within the study by implementing a systematic process to foster validity and credibility in multiple ways. Ravitch and Carl (2021) state that rigor is “directly related to strategic research design in that it requires careful, systematic attention to the selection of your approach at various stages and levels of the design and implementation process” (p. 93). Within this case study, I attended to construct and external validity (Yin, 2018) in the following ways. To ensure construct validity, I used multiple sources of data and engaged in between-methods triangulation. I also used participant validation, or member checks, to allow “study participants to speak into and about [the] study (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 176). After writing up the findings, I shared them via email with the participants and asked for their input, requesting that they, “let me know if this is an accurate representation, or if there is anything I need to change” and stating, “I would hate to misrepresent your perspective, so I welcome all feedback.” Three of the four participants responded via email. Principal Arthur replied, “This is awesome! I'm glad I could help, excuse me... I'm glad Mr. Arthur could help.” Principal Holbrock replied, “This is really great work! I love how you have interconnected the elements of our learning with the implementation and the leading of the work at our schools.” Principal Matthews replied, “I have really enjoyed reading and participating in your work!!! I don't think I have anything that needs to be changed on my end.” Principal Oliver replied in person that the findings accurately

represented her experience in the program. Through this process, I ascertained the accuracy of my interpretation and sought input on any necessary changes or updates needed to understand the experiences and perspectives of the participants more accurately. For external validity, I used replication logic across multiple cases (Yin, 2018). This structure of this process is shown in Figure 3.1 and a specific example using the data in the study is shown in Table 3.8. I used thick description to “thoroughly and clearly [describe] the study’s contextual factors, participants, and experiences so as to produce complex interpretations and findings, which in turn [allows] audiences to make more contextualized meaning of [the] findings” (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Furthermore, I used a data collection protocol to support reliability (see Appendix C). By following a consistent data collection protocol when studying each case, the findings are more likely to be reliable and credible (Yin, 2018).

In addition to these steps to ensure validity, I also engaged in structured reflexivity throughout the study. Ravitch and Carl (2021) note that “structured reflexivity processes are vitally important to conducting rigorous and valid studies” (pp. 184-185). After each document analysis and interview, I created written memos to reflect on and challenge my biases and positionality within the study. I also engaged in analytic memoing to maintain ongoing documentation of my thinking about the data throughout the coding and analysis process. Rogers (2018) explains that “when you reflect and write about data analysis and your thinking with the coding process, it increases your critical thinking and challenges your own assumptions” (p. 890). I engaged in analytic memoing throughout the data analysis process to reveal, understand, and challenge potential biases that may arise. Additionally, through this reflexive writing, I documented my thinking and decision making throughout the study. This writing

creates transparency and provides useful information to more fully understand the scope of the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Confidentiality and Ethical Concerns

This study explores principals' experiences with change in a professional learning program, and as part of this, aims to explore the barriers to change. This topic exists at the nexus of their personal and professional lives, and warrants careful attention to confidentiality and ethical decision making. Ravitch and Carl (2021) explain that “*Confidentiality* is related to an individual's privacy and entails decisions about how and what data related to participants will be disseminated” (p. 214). Throughout this study, I put several conditions in place to protect the confidentiality of the participants. Before conducting this study, I received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of North Florida along with approval from the superintendent of Sunshine School District. To foster internal-facing transparency, I obtained informed consent from each participant, using a form that outlined the purpose of the study, the process and timeline, as well as the protections in place to ensure confidentiality throughout the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). To provide confidentiality, I have used pseudonyms for the participants, their schools, and the school district in which the study takes place. I also used pseudonyms on all data collected throughout the study, in addition to the final report. I captured and stored the audio recordings in an application that is secured using face ID protection, and the transcripts from the interviews and data analysis documents have been stored in a password protected cloud storage site. In addition to these steps to ensure confidentiality through ethical decision making, throughout the study, I have systematically attended to my role

of *researcher as instrument* because my positionality and identity play a significant role in this study (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Researcher Positionality

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument. Therefore, “the identity and positionality of the researcher is viewed as a central and vital part of the inquiry itself” (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 218). Within the context of this study, I exist in two unique spaces, and the roles I play in each space are noteworthy in how they may have influenced the outcomes. Before taking on the role of researcher, I must acknowledge that I also hold the role of co-designer and co-facilitator of principal professional learning within SSD. Being one of the new district leaders that transitioned into district leadership in 2020, I have worked as a part of the new district leadership team to help facilitate organizational change in our dynamic context, thus, it will be important for me to acknowledge the presence of my potential biases and prejudices in relation to this study. Being personally connected to the professional learning program, it will be important for me to take a reflexive approach throughout the study, “developing and maintaining a commitment to a specific and holistic openness to critical feedback and change” (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 218). Furthermore, as a district leader, I am aware of how I may have been perceived by the participants. While I am not a direct supervisor of the principals, I work alongside their supervisors to plan and facilitate professional learning, therefore, I acknowledge the potential power dynamic that may present itself within the context of the study and intentionally create conditions that minimize the influence of this perceived power differential (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Furthermore, in this study, my positionality has the potential to significantly influence the findings. Similarly to Jensen and Moeller’s (2012) study of principal

professional learning, I recognize that my “involvement [in the design and facilitation of the professional learning program being studied] may privilege some stories to be told, and silence others” (p. 100). Remaining mindful of my dual roles in this study, as the professional learning supervisor and researcher, I have actively invested in the reflexive process and regularly interrogated the impact of my biases and position of power on the participants and the stories they share.

Chapter Summary

Through this qualitative multi-case study, I have explored principals’ experiences in a yearlong district designed and facilitated professional learning program focused on three priorities: (a) implementing the district’s instructional vision through an asset orientation, (b) strengthening professional learning communities, and (c) fostering high quality literacy instruction. Following a data collection protocol, I analyzed various documents, some generated within the professional learning sessions and others used within the scope of the principal's role as an instructional leader within their schools, and conducted a series of three interviews to gain a deep understanding of any changes principals may have made to their knowledge, beliefs, or practices. Furthermore, through the analysis of documents and interview data, I have identified facilitators and barriers to change within the context of professional learning for school principals. Recognizing the significance of my positionality within this study, I have consistently attended to ethical decision making and reflexivity throughout the process.

CHAPTER 4: INDIVIDUAL CASE RESULTS

The purpose of this case study is to understand how principals experience change in a yearlong district designed and facilitated professional learning program by exploring their unique and common barriers and facilitators to change. Through an analysis of relevant documents, along with a series of three interviews focused on context, personal change, and leading change, I explored the experiences of four principals who were actively engaged in the professional learning experience and demonstrated efforts to make personal changes to their instructional leadership in order to lead organizational change in their schools. Specifically, I sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do principals experience a yearlong professional learning program focused on implementing the district's instructional vision through an asset orientation, strengthening professional learning communities, and fostering high quality literacy instruction?
 - a. What changes in knowledge do principals identify in each area?
 - b. What changes in beliefs do principals identify in each area?
 - c. What changes in practices do principals identify in each area?
 - d. What barriers and facilitators to change do principals identify in each area?
2. What are the critical connection points between professional learning and change within the program?

In this chapter, I will describe the findings that emerged in each case to provide insight into each principal's unique context and change experience. I provide an overview of each case in Table 4.1 and answer the first research question. In the following chapter, I will present an integrated description of the common findings that emerged through the integrated cross case analysis (Yin, 2018) and answer the second research question.

Table 4.1*Overview of Individual Findings*

Characteristic	Arthur	Holbrook	Matthews	Oliver
Leadership Orientation	Strengths-focused	Growth-focused	Compliance-focused	Reflection-focused
Level	Secondary	Elementary	Secondary	Elementary
Context	Strong culture of collaboration	Strong culture of collaboration	Experienced teachers resistant to change	Experienced teachers resistant to change
Areas of Change	Instructional Vision	Instructional Vision	Instructional Vision	Instructional Vision
	Literacy Instruction	Professional Learning Communities	Professional Learning Communities	Professional Learning Communities
Barriers	Structure	Lack of Clarity	Familiar Content	Inequity of Voice
	Team Dynamics	Competition	Inequity Complacency	Incoherence
Facilitators	Focus	Focus	Resources	Focus
	Collaboration	Collaboration	Coherence	Collaboration
Instructional Leadership Approach	Maximizing strengths in place at the school	Pacing	Pacing	Authentic Learning
		Being visible in learning team meetings & celebrating teachers	Developing teacher leaders to facilitate data-focused conversations	Providing differentiated support for teacher leaders and learning teams.

Principal Arthur

“I know my experts....[and enlist] the strengths of the team.”

Context

Mr. Arthur has been a principal at two secondary schools in Sunshine School District with very different cultures. In his first principalship, he was placed in a school with a low-expectations culture in need of a positive professional shift. Mr. Arthur knew his first school needed a focus on high quality teaching and learning. Despite this less-than-optimal situation, when describing his experience at his previous school, Mr. Arthur described an optimistic approach to changing the culture:

I knew we could do this. I know four or five people I have on this campus that can do it.

Now, can we bring in some of the naysayers into the positive group? And then, if they aren't going to be a part of it, then we coach them out.

After two years as principal at that school, Mr. Arthur transitioned to his current school, also within Sunshine School District, with an established professional culture of strong collaboration and instruction. Because the context was different, Mr. Arthur changed his instructional leadership approach. He explained how he was now more focused on maintaining what was working and making minor adjustments, as needed, to continue to grow, saying:

[The former principal] handed over this beautiful car. I've got to make sure I keep my hands on the wheel, but also make sure we're doing proper maintenance and not just revving the engine.

Mr. Arthur recognizes that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to school leadership and has adapted his support to meet the needs of the school.

While the teachers at his current school are more instructionally focused than his previous school, he continues to prioritize being in classrooms with teachers and students to stay in tune with the teaching and learning occurring throughout the school. He shared, “I’m someone who has to get up and go to classes. So that’s always going to be the most valuable for me.” Although Mr. Arthur knows that strong instruction is taking place within his school, he continues to look for opportunities to celebrate success and foster continued growth for teachers and students.

Having served in two schools with contrasting cultures, Mr. Arthur recognizes and capitalizes on the strengths within his current school. When describing his school, he shared, “We don’t really lose that many people... For most people, it’s a destination school.” Even though his school has experienced success, Mr. Arthur was engaged in the yearlong principal professional learning program focused on the three district priorities and has maintained a focus on strengthening teaching and learning as a result of his collaborative experiences within the program.

Change

While he did not describe his overall experience as transformational, Principal Arthur discussed some changes in knowledge, beliefs, and practices as a result of the yearlong principal professional learning experience. In the following sections, I describe the changes in knowledge, beliefs and practices Principal Arthur reported as a result of his participation in the program to answer the following sub-questions of RQ1:

- a. What changes in knowledge do principals identify in each area?
- b. What changes in beliefs do principals identify in each area?
- c. What changes in practices do principals identify in each area?

Knowledge. The changes in knowledge that Mr. Arthur discussed primarily emerged from the collaborative time established in each session for school leaders to engage in collective discussion and problem solving. In the area of high quality literacy instruction, Mr. Arthur explained:

I was able to get more insight from other schools as far as how they were using [the new reading curriculum], especially with learning about the pullout lessons they had for small groups for each kid. I think that was important.

Collaborative structures were also beneficial for helping Mr. Arthur navigate the operational aspects of running a school more efficiently so that he could focus more on teaching and learning. He stated, “The dedicated time we have to go through each secondary school issue, like where we sit and have a roundtable with [the Director of Secondary Schools]. That is so valuable for all of us.” Furthermore, the collaborative relationships cultivated within the principal professional learning program have extended outside of the monthly principal professional learning sessions. Mr. Arthur shared this collaborative experience, describing his efforts in developing a schedule that maximizes student instructional time:

Like even today...I sent out to the high school principal [text] thread “Hey, how many lunches do you guys have?” [Cathy] has three at her school, so I was like “Hey, can you send me your schedule so we can take a look and see [how you were able to schedule them].”

Overall, collaborative experiences during the principal professional learning program contributed to changes in knowledge for Principal Arthur.

Additionally, Mr. Arthur shared that he appreciated the refined asset-based approach to

using the district walkthrough log, learning that the expectation of walkthrough feedback does not always require sharing a next step for improvement with the teacher. Rather, effective feedback can also highlight effective instructional practices and their impact on student learning. He explained:

You're not going to always go in and find that next step. That was kind of frustrating for me with how we did it before, where you had to find a next action step. If there's good teaching taking place, you may not always see [a possible next step].

This asset orientation to conducting walkthroughs aligned with Mr. Arthur's strengths-based leadership perspective. Knowing this asset-oriented approach was also supported by the district, Mr. Arthur readily integrated this knowledge into his understanding of instructional leadership.

During the program, Mr. Arthur experienced changes in knowledge in areas related to the district priorities of implementing the district's instructional vision through an asset orientation and fostering high quality literacy instruction. Additionally, ongoing collaborative discussions with other secondary principals led to changes in operational knowledge, which was beneficial for Mr. Arthur as a school leader balancing operational and instructional needs.

Beliefs. Mr. Arthur's belief in fostering collective leadership through an asset orientation was reinforced through the yearlong principal professional learning program. With a focus on developing strong professional learning communities led by teacher leaders, Principal Arthur has developed a belief in the value of distributed leadership that allows for teacher collaboration and differentiated support for teachers. When discussing his leadership style, Principal Arthur explained:

I think I am much more open, and I want to know everyone's opinion on something. I don't want to just make a decision with it and then have to come in and explain it. I want to know 'what do you think?' I really want to have that input.

Distributed leadership was modeled in the principal professional learning program and was also implemented by Mr. Arthur within his school.

Furthermore, this collective approach to leadership was enacted with the purpose of fostering high levels of student achievement. Principal Arthur explained:

Everything's about students. But also to have happy students, you have to have happy teachers. You don't have happy teachers, you're not going to have happy test scores, because you're not going to have happy students. In the grand scheme of things, with 1,800 students, that's not always easy to do, but I think we do a pretty good job of putting out the positive and showcasing what we are doing, where if [a teacher is] not on board, it's pretty damn hard. There's plenty of other places for [those teachers].

Mr. Arthur recognizes the interconnectedness of leadership, teaching, and learning, and believes in collectively fostering a culture of high expectations for teachers and students. To do this, he ensures that teachers on his campus are engaged in meaningful authentic work, employing their unique strengths, to make a positive impact on the school culture and student learning. Principal Arthur explained, "I've got to rely on my experts in each individual field because they're the experts." Knowing that the principal cannot possibly know everything, Mr. Arthur confidently positions teacher leaders from each department as key decision makers in the pursuit of high quality teaching and learning.

Furthermore, although he valued asset-based distributed leadership before his participation in the principal professional learning program, Principal Arthur's belief in his ability to lead collectively was reinforced. He found it affirming to have a district supported focus area, explored by all principals throughout the district, which emphasized the importance of identifying and leveraging the assets of everyone within the school.

Practices. As a result of an ongoing focus on the three district priorities throughout the yearlong professional learning program, Mr. Arthur described how his instructional leadership practice has developed, most specifically in the area of implementing the district's instructional vision through an asset orientation. As an instructional leader, he is focused on collectively clarifying the meaning of high expectations, recognizing and leveraging teacher strengths to provide differentiated support in each department, and learning more about enacting respectful accountability through meaningful teacher feedback.

Fostering high expectations within his school is a priority for Mr. Arthur. Believing that clarity is a lever for action, he is working to collectively define the meaning of high expectations with his faculty, and using this collective understanding to engage teacher leaders in shared leadership. He explained:

I think it helps define what we have as a culture at our school: That we have high expectations. I'm glad that we're mapping out those high expectations. Because we talked about 'We have high expectations, but what does that actually mean?'

Mr. Arthur acknowledges that having a common school wide understanding of what high expectations looks like and sounds like can provide a foundation for more meaningful instructional conversations, leading to more effective teaching and learning.

Along those lines, after engaging in regular classroom walkthroughs, Mr. Arthur aims to share meaningful and supportive feedback with teachers that facilitates progress toward the teacher's professional goals. He stated:

How do I give [meaningful] feedback to a teacher? That's something that's tough. I think for me here, there's got to be a relationship put in place beforehand, before you just shoot [walkthrough log feedback] out and send an email and tell a teacher 'hey, you need to increase your rigor.' It needs to be over three or four different meetings with coaching and then, celebrating successes they have."

Mr. Arthur recognizes his responsibility for creating a feedback culture of respectful accountability, grounded in relationships.

Furthermore, Mr. Arthur has created structures to provide differentiated teacher support through an asset orientation. He acknowledges the value of focusing on the district's instructional vision, but also recognizes that while each teacher at his school is a learner, each is in a different place in their teaching journey. He explains:

I help [teachers] grow from where they are. I know for one of my English teachers, if I went to her class and asked her what a learning target was, she was hired in February. She doesn't know, but now that she's got classroom management kind of figured out, we can move to that. But I can't go in every single class with that walkthrough form and treat everyone the same way because we're not all there. It's just like kids."

When visiting classrooms, Mr. Arthur determines what teachers are doing well and what next steps for support might be most beneficial to help teachers grow in their craft.

He also uses these opportunities to employ the strengths of teacher leaders to support more novice teachers, fostering collective leadership within the school. Mr. Arthur shared:

If I go into a history class here, and there's an issue, I know I can talk to my department head and we can figure out what's going on. But for the most part, people really inherently want to do a good job.”

He demonstrates an asset-based approach to providing differentiated support for teachers in his pursuit of achieving high levels of student learning.

Additionally, Mr. Arthur regularly recognizes and celebrates teacher strengths. Celebrating what teachers are doing well is another way that he provides differentiated support within his school. When describing his *Educator All Stars* initiative, where he recognizes teachers who are doing great work in his weekly newsletter, he explained, “I use that as a motivator...when [a struggling teacher] had a couple good weeks, I put her on there. It’s a little thing, but people want to be a part of that.” It is clear Mr. Arthur finds value in recognizing teachers’ assets and leveraging them to foster growth in teaching and learning. Although focusing on implementing the district’s instructional vision through an asset orientation was not a transformational idea for Mr. Arthur, his instructional leadership practices in this area were validated, refined and reinforced through his participation in the yearlong principal professional learning program.

These changes in Mr. Arthur's knowledge, beliefs, and practices were influenced by the barriers and facilitators to change that he experienced within the program. In the following sections, I will answer the following sub-question of RQ1:

- d. What barriers and facilitators to change do principals identify in each area?

Barriers

Within a professional learning context, the interactions among the key players can present as barriers or facilitators to the change outcomes of the learning experience. When describing his personal experience in the principal professional learning program, Mr. Arthur described a barrier that resulted from misaligned interactions between the change facilitator and the learning agent. As he recounted his experience in his principal professional learning community team, he said, “You put a bunch of high school principals together in a meeting like that and give us some time. It's not always going to be productive... You've got to assign us. You've got to put us in certain roles.” In this statement, Mr. Arthur alludes to misalignment between the level of structure and support provided during the professional learning session and the readiness of the learning agents. In this case, there were gaps in the change facilitator's awareness of the readiness and social dynamics among high school principals, as a collective group. Because this misalignment between the levels of structure and support and learning agent readiness was not evident within all principal professional learning teams, this barrier supports the need for differentiated learning experiences and supports for school principals based on their readiness levels and learning goals. While this portion of the learning experience was designed in alignment with the effective professional learning features of active learning, collective participation, and sustained duration (Learning Forward, n.d.), it seems that the lack of sufficient structure may have surfaced a social barrier to meaningful learning among the group (Ellsworth, 2000). Mr. Arthur's mention of the need for assigned roles seems to imply that the interpersonal dynamics among the high school principals may not have been conducive to the organic establishment of informal leadership within the group. Accordingly, this finding suggests that

barriers can emerge when change facilitators are not fully aware of or do not effectively respond to the learning needs of the learning agents within a professional learning program.

Overall, Principal Arthur described barriers related to structure and team dynamics. However, he also described facilitators that led to changes in his instructional leadership practice.

Facilitators

Professional learning is complex and multifaceted (Darling-Hammond et. al, 2007), and Mr. Arthur's perspective illuminates a duality of experiences within the principal professional learning program. While he did experience barriers to change, Mr. Arthur also recounted aspects of the program that facilitated the personal and organizational change process. Two facilitators that influenced change for him were (a) focus, and (b) structured collaboration.

Mr. Arthur found value in having clearly defined goals and expectations for leaders aligned to the district's priorities. He used the quarterly focus areas aligned to the district's instructional vision as a focus when supporting teachers within his school. He explained,:

[The quarterly focus areas are] what we focused on. We didn't really get into responding to assessments,...but we were focusing on, 'let's get really good at learning targets. Make sure we have a check for it. And then now we need to get better into taking those checks for understanding and having the formative assessments that we can also bring back to know if the learning target is being met.' We'll start the [next] year with learning targets and checks for understanding, but then we'll get into it with our PLCs and build on what we talked about this year. We have to, within our department head meetings, we've got to

be able to talk about the data to make sure that we're giving the right assessments to match.

Having participated in the principal professional learning program where these quarterly focus areas were revisited throughout the year, Mr. Arthur also maintained a consistent focus on communicating clear learning targets and checking for understanding within his school. Furthermore, he plans to continue to build on these focus areas in the following year. He explained: “I take pieces from [the district’s instructional vision]. I know we can’t do everything... If you want to get good, we want to be good at a couple of different things and then we can build off of that.” Mr. Arthur recognizes focus as a facilitator of change and maintains a focus on a few key priorities when leading change within his school.

Collaboration also played a meaningful role in Mr. Arthur’s professional learning experience. According to Mr. Arthur, opportunities for structured and focused collaboration allowed principals to learn from each other's strengths. He explained, “Collaboration within the meetings is the key to high school principals. And most of us are pretty young, as far as being in our roles. I think [Michael’s] been at his school the longest, like 10 years.” Having the opportunity to learn from the collective experiences of other high school principals was a valuable source of learning, and a catalyst for change. When reflecting on the principal professional learning program, Mr. Arthur suggested, “Keep the collaboration piece of it, but really build in getting into schools and collaborating around [collective classroom walkthrough experiences].” He shared his desire to translate these positive collaborative experiences from the professional learning program into a more job-embedded structure by conducting walkthroughs

with other leaders in each other's schools followed by a discussion of ways to engage teachers in meaningful feedback conversations based on the shared experiences in the walkthroughs.

Overall, Mr. Arthur's experience in the principal professional learning program suggests the value in designing and facilitating meaningful opportunities for strengths-based collaboration that allow principals to learn from the experiences of one another. Additionally, it is necessary for the change facilitators to closely attend to the readiness levels of the learning agents to ensure that the structure and support are conducive to meaningful learning.

Principal Holbrock

"I don't think I'm bad, but I definitely know I need to get better."

Context

Principal Holbrock is an elementary school principal finishing her second year in a school where she previously served as assistant principal. With experience as an educator in both elementary and secondary schools, Ms. Holbrock operates from a growth mindset, acknowledging that she is developing more confidence in her role as school principal each day, and prioritizes teacher support as a foundation for instructional leadership.

As a novice teacher, Principal Holbrock served as a behavioral support teacher for students at the secondary level. However, her growth orientation propelled her into more diverse educational experiences, and has allowed her to develop a strong understanding of effective instructional practices at the elementary level. Describing her growth mindset, Principal Holbrock shared, "I can [always] do better. I can do more. I can give better feedback. I can look at my feedback and see where I need to focus and maybe even try to have more conversations."

Principal Holbrock continuously demonstrates a growth mindset in her journey as a developing school leader.

In her two-year journey as a school principal, Principal Holbrock has developed confidence in her leadership skills by seeing the results of her investment in teachers. She explained:

I try to do stuff for the teachers. I know that's the hardest job on the campus...so I want them to feel appreciated, to know that they're valued... I feel that's what I'm good at.

And that's a success here because I do think it's created a very positive culture.

Recognizing the importance of acknowledging teachers' assets and showing appreciation, Ms. Holbrock prioritizes relationships as a necessary prerequisite for meaningful instructional leadership.

With this growth focused approach to learning and an emphasis on teacher support, Ms. Holbrock actively engaged in the principal professional learning program and experienced personal change as an instructional leader, while also taking steps within her school to enact organizational change in alignment with the three district priorities.

Change

Through her engagement in the program, Principal Holbrock experienced and enacted changes to strengthen teacher collaboration within her school's professional learning community and to sharpen instructional practice through frequent walkthroughs and targeted feedback.

Pairing these instructional leadership practices led to a more focused and intentional approach to leadership during her second year as principal. In the following sections, I describe the changes

in knowledge, beliefs and practices Principal Holbrock reported as a result of her participation in the program to answer the following sub-questions of RQ1:

- a. What changes in knowledge do principals identify in each area?
- b. What changes in beliefs do principals identify in each area?
- c. What changes in practices do principals identify in each area?

Knowledge. Over the course of the year, Ms. Holbrock developed a deeper understanding of instructional practices and leadership moves to support her priority of fostering high levels of student achievement. She explained, “Student achievement is primary, and [also] creating an environment where everybody feels valued, the teachers, the support staff and the scholars. Those are my two priorities.” Paired with her attention to investing in teachers, Principal Holbrock prioritizes student learning by employing the knowledge she developed through the principal professional learning program, especially in the area of implementing the district’s instructional vision through an asset orientation.

Principal Holbrock valued the learning experiences focused on clarifying the meaning of the instructional principles of the district’s vision. Delving into the specific teacher and student indicators for each principle allowed Principal Holbrock to develop a deeper understanding of the nuances of implementing these instructional moves within classrooms. This change in knowledge led to more meaningful support for teachers in using these principles more effectively to cultivate student achievement. When reflecting on her learning journey, she shared:

As you get more comfortable and have more practice with [noticing the principles of instruction in walkthroughs and sharing feedback], then it translates more to what's actually happening. So I think your lens is more linear to start with. And then it becomes broader as you have more experience and you're more comfortable with the [walkthrough

indicators], with what you're looking for. 'Is this [evidence of that principle]?' and then it can even get more specific because you get more comfortable, so your expectations are a little bit higher for it because you've been doing all of this learning.

Principal Holbrock recognizes that change is an iterative process, describing how ongoing attention to the walkthrough indicators for the principles of instruction has resulted in deeper learning. Ms. Holbrock's learning was initiated with a narrow focus on the explicit meaning of each indicator within the professional learning program. Then, her understanding was broadened as she engaged in discussions with colleagues to explore what student and teacher actions would suffice as evidence of effective implementation and looked for the indicators in action within classrooms. Finally, as a result of this additional experiential context, Principal Holbrock shared that she has developed a deeper understanding of the conditions for meaningful implementation of each principle and holds high expectations for effective practice. She is now able to narrow her attention to the nuances of specific indicators to better support teachers in implementing the principles of instruction within their classrooms.

As a result of her deeper understanding of the instructional vision, Principal Holbrock is able to craft more focused feedback with greater intentionality to foster teacher and student learning. Throughout the year, she actively sought to translate her experiences in the principal professional learning sessions into practice within her school. She explained:

I love that we're making progress. I will say this. I think a lot of times too, whatever we came from the principals meeting with is what I was looking for. So like, whatever was fresh in my memory is something that would be where my focus is.

The consistent focus on implementing the district's instructional vision through an asset orientation seemed to contribute to the changes in Ms. Holbrock's knowledge of instructional principles, giving her more confidence to lead organizational changes within her school.

Beliefs. When reflecting on how her beliefs have changed as a result of her experiences, in the principal professional learning program, Principal Holbrock discussed an increase in her efficacy as an instructional leader. After engaging in the program, she has experienced success in implementing instructional leadership moves, which has helped her to gain more confidence. She explained, "I think that leading that work in that way and making it such a priority for us, and hearing the successes from my teachers of how, 'oh my gosh, this does work.' I do feel accomplished." Ms. Holbrock's efficacy was strengthened through her experience in the program, and she attributes the program's intentional design as a reason for this growth. She found the deliberate chunking of information into meaningful segments to be particularly beneficial, and has structured her school-based professional learning in a similar way. As a result, Ms. Holbrock's belief in her ability to empower teachers through meaningful school-based professional learning experiences has strengthened. She explains:

[Prior professional learning was] fast and furious as opposed to deliberate, intentional and in segments. So I feel like that is how I want to give it to my teachers because I think you learn, and you own, and you see the importance when it's like that, and you keep people from being overwhelmed. And when people are overwhelmed, they're not buying into anything. They're not going to do it.

With a better understanding of designing and facilitating meaningful sequences of professional learning experiences, Principal Holbrock's belief in herself as an effective instructional leader has changed for the better.

Practices. Principal Holbrock described changes in practice that emerged from implementing leadership actions explored during the principal professional learning program, specifically in the area of implementing the district's instructional vision and strengthening professional learning communities. While classroom walkthroughs have always been a leadership expectation, Principal Holbrock now recognizes the necessity of engaging in feedback conversations with teachers after visiting classrooms. She explained:

I also think that that feedback is how we grow. So if teachers aren't ever getting feedback, how are they growing? ... Because you can do walkthroughs all day long without feedback. ... That just feels like you're checking up on me if you're not giving me feedback. And I will say that the teachers here appreciate that feedback.

Knowing that teacher growth results from feedback, Ms. Holbrock has increased this practice within her school.

Additionally, Principal Holbrock has taken a more active role in leading PLC teams. She shared:

No longer is the day that I don't feel like I can do this. [I can't] absolve myself from what teachers are doing in PLC. I remember when PLC first started and I was at [my previous school]. I never knew what the purpose was. We got together with this group that I had never really usually met with. And then we had to fill out a paper and then I never really understood it until our recent work.

Through ongoing learning experiences within our principal professional learning program, Ms. Holbrock developed a deeper understanding of the purpose of professional learning teams and learned ways to support their growth. When reflecting on ways her practice has changed when supporting professional learning teams, she described being more visible in PLC meetings and she also identifies the strengths of learning teams in order to celebrate their success. She explained:

We picked which [PLC team] we thought was really high performing, the ones that were on track, and they were the PLC team of the week... and I put like a candy bar in everybody's box that was on that team and I only picked one out of the four that we would visit that week. So I recognized 'You're doing the right work'

Incorporating her desire to invest in her teachers, Principal Holbrock became more involved in strengthening the PLC teams within her school as a result of the collaborative ongoing learning experiences in the principal professional learning program.

These changes in Ms. Holbrock's knowledge, beliefs, and practices were influenced by the barriers and facilitators to change that she experienced within the program. In the following sections, I will answer the following sub-question of RQ1:

- d. What barriers and facilitators to change do principals identify in each area?

Barriers

While Principal Holbrock experienced many positive changes as a result of her participation in the professional learning program, she also encountered barriers to change. The barriers she identified resulted from interactions between the change facilitator and the learning agent, as well as interactions between the learning agent and the learning environment.

The first barrier Principal Holbrock identified was the change facilitator's use of general statements without clear action steps. When the interaction between the change facilitator and learning agent is ambiguous, the learning agent is unable to enact change effectively. She described this experience by sharing:

One of the things that was not helpful was when we talked about the walkthroughs and about how they needed to be. That we needed to step up our game. But then, [I was wondering] what's a good example of a good one because I don't know where I'm at...I hear you saying that doing 300 is great, and that those are the meaningful ones and that doing 20 is not great, and those are not meaningful. Well, I'm somewhere in the middle. So what about mine? Where am I on that pendulum?

As a growth oriented leader, Principal Holbrock desired more specific and actionable information in order to “step up her game” without having to guess about what to do or try to figure it out herself¹.

Additionally, Principal Holbrock described sensing a competitive culture between the elementary and secondary principals, rather than an environment of collaboration. While the program was designed around collaborative learning experiences, the elementary and secondary principals often grouped themselves with leaders of the same level, resulting in elementary leaders and secondary leaders being in separate homogeneous groups. When describing this barrier emerging from the interactions among the learning agents and the learning environment, Principal Holbrock stated:

¹ In alignment with the theory of action, having received similar feedback from multiple leaders after that specific session, adjustments were made to the program and more clarity was provided during the following session.

I wonder if maybe having secondary people split up and mix with the elementary people would foster mutual respect, because I feel like they don't respect [elementary leaders]. They think it's so different...and I think if they sat and listened to the conversations, and they heard...I can sit there and say, 'Oh, they don't do this or they don't do that.' But when I'm talking to them and listening to how they're implementing instructional leadership in their school. Maybe I can learn something.”

Principal Holbrock values learning from others, recognizing that she can learn from leaders at different levels. However, she acknowledges that the competitive culture she perceived between elementary and secondary principals was a barrier to her learning during this program.

Overall, Principal Holbrock described barriers related to lack of clarity and a competitive culture. However, despite these barriers, there were also facilitators that resulted in meaningful instructional leadership changes for Principal Holbrock.

Facilitators

When describing her experience in the yearlong principal professional learning program, Principal Holbrock shared that she found value in: (a) the program's clear focus on a few actionable priorities paired with a reasonable expectation for change in small increments over time as well as (b) opportunities for meaningful small group collaboration.

When describing the beneficial structure of the program, Ms. Holbrock stated:

In previous years, it was so fast and furious. It was so much and so overwhelming that you couldn't even think about how am I going to break this down and bring it back? I mean, you just wanted to kind of ignore it because it was too big and there wasn't bite

sized pieces, and I feel like last year we started with the vision and giving us those quarterly focuses I mean, it gave us a directive of what we're looking for.

While too much information shared at one time seems to be a barrier to change, the yearlong principal professional program's organization into smaller meaningful chunks facilitated greater learning and increased the likelihood of Principal Holbrock's implementation. She shared:

I think we're all feeling comfortable.... Just because you give us time. You give us [some information and time to implement] and then you lay the next layer. Like, 'We all did really great. We feel good about it. Now it's time to lay the next layer'.

Principal Holbrock found the iterative nature of the professional learning design to be beneficial because it provided ongoing opportunities to learn and implement change at a manageable pace. She also indicated that the program kept her more focused on instructional leadership. She described this focus, stating:

I feel like I'm more focused. I feel like I have my intentions, and what I am engaged in is more directed...I'm very clear on what you guys expect from us. And so having that clarity helps me to drive that work here.

The structure and focus of the program's learning experiences resulted in greater intentionality in Principal Holbrock's instructional leadership. Knowing that a principal's role encompasses more than being an instructional leader (Grissom et. al, 2021), they must make decisions each day as to how to most meaningfully spend their time. The sustained duration of the program, with seven sessions over the course of a school year, proved to be a valuable facilitator for meaningful instructional change by maintaining a focus on the instructional leadership practices throughout the year. Principal Holbrock explained:

I do think that the principal meetings not only give you the information, but keep you focused. We know we're going to have to go back. We know we're doing it every month. It's easy to get lost in everything that the job entails. It's easy to get all caught up in all of the things that don't really push student achievement, so having that monthly meeting that monthly refocus. 'Okay, what are we looking at? What is our focus?' and knowing that 'okay, I reset and move forward.' I think that is helpful in itself. Because here's the thing, if you did quarterly [meetings], that's a lot of lost time to get caught up in other things. To me, it gives us that opportunity to stay focused and not lose momentum.

These ongoing collaborative opportunities helped to facilitate positive changes in instructional leadership for Ms. Holbrock, which she used to lead organizational change within her school.

Additionally, when describing the process of translating her personal learning into organizational learning, she identified the actionable tools shared during the principal professional learning sessions as facilitators for change. She shared, "I think we got a lot of tools to bring back...I had a lot of ideas for PD based on the PD that we got, so I think it's easy to translate it here in bite sized pieces." She went on to explain, "I think the action steps are what comes from the principal's meetings. And they're always actionable steps." According to Principal Holbrock, meaningful change for principals and schools is facilitated by structuring collaborative learning opportunities in frequent, meaningful chunks and providing actionable tools for implementation at each step along the way.

Furthermore, opportunities for meaningful small group collaboration served as facilitators to change. Principal Holbrock explained:

By us doing our own PLC at the at the principals meeting, it made me accountable to

being more focused on what the teachers were doing. Because I knew I had to come back and have a conversation about what was happening. So it did make me very accountable to have those conversations.

Knowing that she would be collaborating each month with other principals provided motivation and accountability for engaging with teachers in their PLC teams within her school. She elaborated on this sense of accountability, stating:

I think that by knowing that we were accountable to a group and you needed to have that information, you know, I think made us more active and come up with ways of how we are going to incorporate it. How is that going to be a part of our norm as leaders?...We came up with that that worked for us and I just think [the PLC teams] valued our visits and our input when we would be there...plus it made them feel like it was valued...So I think a lot of people stepped up their game because of that. I think making us accountable at that level translated [to the teachers]...I'm not going to go to a group of principals, especially as a newer principal and not have something to talk about and not have my documents.

The sense of collective accountability that was generated through the ongoing meaningful collaborative experience of principal PLC teams contributed to learning for teachers as Ms. Holbrock engaged more intentionally with teams of teachers based on the expectations of the program.

Principal Holbrock was also able to learn from other leaders during the collaborative experiences built into the program, and her sense of connectedness to other leaders was strengthened through frequent collaboration. At times in the program, principals selected their

own groups, and at other times, they were assigned to groups. During the program, Ms. Holbrock preferred selecting her own group, however, when discussing a time when she was assigned to a group, Ms. Holbrock explained:

I liked their different perspectives, getting to know people a little bit differently. So although I had my one safe person, I enjoyed the conversations with other people that I wouldn't normally hear their perspective. And once again, I think it breaks down those stereotypes that you have when you engage in a conversation more small group because you get to hear their ideas and you get to know people and it's not just somebody saying something in a whole group.

Although being a principal can be lonely, listening to the experiences of other principals and learning alongside leaders facing similar situations can foster a sense of much needed connection (Prothero, 2015). Furthermore, intentionally designed collaborative experiences, even when assigned to a group, can also strengthen a culture of mutual respect among leaders, as Principal Holbrock explains:

As much as I don't like [having assigned seats], hearing people that I don't normally hear from is very enlightening. And I think that some of that is good. I mean, hearing from the secondary perspective is helpful, because we sit back, and we think why do they do things like that? Well, then you hear and you're like, ah, that makes sense. Now, I know why they do it like that, you know, so having those conversations are helpful.

Even though some collaborative groups in the program were self-selected and others were assigned, for Principal Holbrock, collaboration in both structures proved to be valuable facilitators of change.

Overall, Ms. Holbrock's experience in the principal professional learning program suggests that collaborative learning environments may be more conducive to change than competitive environments. Additionally, when designing a professional learning program, it can be valuable to establish clear and reasonable expectations for action paired with opportunities to check in on implementation over time to provide meaningful accountability resulting in personal and organizational change.

Principal Matthews

"I feel like my main priorities have been to make sure that I am doing what is expected of me from the district"

Context

Principal Matthews is a junior high principal finishing her third year at her current school. She has been a principal at three different schools: two within the Sunshine School District and one in a smaller neighboring district. Ms. Matthews is an experienced principal, and currently finds herself leading an experienced faculty. The majority of the teachers were teaching at the school when she became principal, and the teachers have established long standing relationships with one another. As a result of their teaching experience, Ms. Matthews explained, "I think as a whole our campus is probably more ahead than other places." She shared that when she arrived at the school, dedicated time for weekly collaboration was already an established practice.

However, despite Ms. Matthews' and her faculty's prior educational experience, they have encountered many new challenges in the recent culture of change. Principal Matthews

recognizes that there are challenges within our current system that were not there several years ago. She explained:

COVID alone...has certainly created a change in my experience. It's just more issues than ever before. And that's a variety of things. I think people's mental health and well-being, and we're not talking just kids, we're talking adults and staff, and the amount of drama and issues and things that I have had to consider. This sounds bad because I don't think the climate and culture has been an issue ongoing, but it has had to take more of a front seat to keep pushing and motivating people and in trying to appreciate them more than ever before. Not that we weren't... but sometimes I feel like I've just got to do it to try to keep them hanging on.

The changes resulting from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic have presented novel challenges that have not previously been navigated in education. Furthermore, while navigating these uncharted waters, Ms. Matthews continues to feel an obligation to the district to foster high levels of teaching and learning within her school. She shared, "I think one of the big challenges is trying to continue to push our team forward with what I understand [to be] the district's instructional vision and expectation...and then also keeping in mind that teachers are very overwhelmed and overworked." Principal Matthews recognizes the importance of supporting teachers, while also navigating the tension she is experiencing in her role as an instructional leader.

With a focus on meeting district expectations, Ms. Matthews actively participated in the principal professional learning program and sought out ways to make the most of these learning experiences for herself and her school as a learning organization.

Change

Similar to Mr. Arthur, Ms. Matthews did not describe her overall experience in the professional learning program as transformational, although she did report changes in her knowledge, beliefs, and practices in the area of strengthening professional learning communities. In the following sections, I describe the changes in knowledge, beliefs and practices Principal Matthews reported as a result of her participation in the program to answer the following sub-questions of RQ1:

- a. What changes in knowledge do principals identify in each area?
- b. What changes in beliefs do principals identify in each area?
- c. What changes in practices do principals identify in each area?

Knowledge. Through her experiences in the professional learning program, Ms. Matthews developed a deeper understanding of the purpose and value of professional learning communities. Although her faculty had engaged in weekly collaborative meetings for years, the purpose of the collaboration was not clear for every team or consistent throughout the school. As a result of her increased knowledge of the benefits of working as a professional learning community, she experienced personal change in her instructional leadership of PLC teams. Ms. Matthews explained:

I definitely [think about instructional leadership differently] with the PLCs. I absolutely do, about it being a necessity. I also think of it as ‘think smarter, not harder’, because you can learn from people and what they're doing and doing well, and it's difficult to do this work alone.

Now that Ms. Matthews has experienced the benefits of working as a professional learning community, she knows that this collaborative structure is essential to effective teaching and

learning. Additionally, Principal Matthews developed a deeper knowledge of using data and learning artifacts to inform instructional decisions. She shared:

Coming back to my building, there were still teachers that struggled with the [Team Analysis of Common Assessment Form], for instance. I think it's still overwhelming for some people, and I told them, even if you don't use that form, if there's something else that you use that you create, because it can be a lot for some of them to look at. That is probably one of my biggest takeaways from [the principal professional learning]. It's just data. It strengthened what I realized they have to have and bring to the table [during learning team meetings].

While not every team is using data to inform instructional decisions yet, Ms. Matthews' knowledge of how to support teachers in developing this practice has changed, and she is now more skilled at helping teachers strengthen their work in professional learning communities through meaningful data-informed decision making.

Beliefs. Accordingly, Ms. Matthews' belief in the power of using student artifacts and data during learning team meetings to make intentional plans for student learning has been strengthened. She stated:

If we don't use artifacts and student data to drive the conversation, it's really just a glorified team meeting and check in. We can talk about where kids struggled, what they didn't understand with delivery. We can talk about the instructional practice, but we still have to look at data to drive, 'Why didn't it work? How many kids got it? Who didn't get it? And what do you think the reason is?' It drives all conversations, and/or should drive all conversations.

Ms. Matthews recognizes that collaborative conversations need to move beyond the sharing of information, but rather, teachers should work together to analyze and make instructional decisions based on evidence, including student work and student achievement data.

Knowing that using data collaboratively to inform a team-based approach to instruction is a significant shift in practice for some teachers, Ms. Matthews has also developed a belief in the importance of developing teacher leaders within each learning team to foster distributed leadership throughout the school. When discussing how her beliefs have changed over the past year, Principal Matthew explained:

I think [my instructional leadership changes] have empowered those teachers, primarily my leadership team, and...that was my goal this year, to focus on that leadership team.

You know, I can remember [a district leader] saying last year, and I think he said it this year too, be strategic when you pick that leadership team. Pick the people who can [lead their team in teaching and learning].

Through investing in the growth of teacher leaders, Ms. Matthews has strengthened her belief in her ability to lead her faculty in meaningful professional learning communities focused on high levels of teaching and learning.

Practices. Principal Matthews described changes in her instructional leadership practice that emerged from her experience in the principal professional learning program, specifically in the areas of implementing the district's instructional vision and strengthening professional learning communities. She became more focused and intentional with her instructional support by conducting ongoing walkthroughs and using the results of the walkthrough data to be more strategic in her leadership moves. When describing these changes, Ms. Matthews explained:

I think that there was a really good focus through the meetings about what is going well, like we always brought it back to the data through our walkthroughs because we always pulled up that data and we were asked to pull up our data dashboard. And [back at the school] we would use that to kind of drive what we were seeing and what's working and what's not. And then we would prioritize, 'okay, well, we're still only at 53.6% in this area, and that's going well. Now, how do we, you know, what are we doing there?' ...I definitely think that we always talked about data and what we were seeing through walkthroughs for sure, because that's probably the most relevant data.

By discussing the data with her administrative team, Ms. Matthews was able to lead more targeted support throughout her school.

As a result, Ms. Matthews is now meeting regularly with her administrative team to review walkthrough data, discuss topics from the principal and assistant principal meetings, and establish the focus of future walkthroughs. This change has resulted in a more cohesive approach to instructional leadership by the administrative team. Principal Matthews shared:

Something that I am doing differently, I will say is [this year] I meet with my leadership team. My APS, we meet every Monday morning. We have our leadership meeting at 8am. So I create an agenda, including what we're doing for the week, things that are coming up...we have talked specifically about some of the things from the [principal and assistant principal] meeting, because we're not all together, you know, we all go different days. So we'll come back that next week typically, in a more formal setting versus an impromptu [conversation or text], and we've kind of guided our conversations and our lens...to focus on responding to data and things that we're seeing from walkthroughs for

that whole second semester. You know, we've said, 'Okay, well, we're going to only look at this, and we're going to provide feedback'

Recognizing that organizational change results from the combined effort of her administrative team, Principal Matthews has established a practice of formal meetings devoted to fostering cohesive leadership of teaching and learning throughout the school.

Furthermore, in addition to strengthening her administrative leadership team, Ms. Matthews began meeting regularly with her teacher leaders this year in an effort to foster their leadership skills. As a result of her focus on developing teacher leadership within the PLC teams, she described changes in the practice of teacher leaders as well. She stated:

I think my teacher leaders in particular have more confidence in leading their PLCs in their departments and handling when they have peer conflict and disagreements, [by explaining] 'this is where we're going' and continuing to articulate the vision and why we do what we do.

The changes in personal practice that Principal Matthews experienced seemed to have also influenced the practice of her administrative team and teacher leaders within her school, resulting in the beginning stages of organizational change.

These changes in Ms. Matthews' knowledge, beliefs, and practices were influenced by the barriers and facilitators to change that she experienced within the program. In the following sections, I will answer the following sub-question of RQ1:

- d. What barriers and facilitators to change do principals identify in each area?

Barriers

Even though Ms. Matthews reported changes in her knowledge, beliefs, and practices as a result of the yearlong principal professional learning program; she did not experience transformational change due to barriers within the professional learning context combined with barriers in her school context.

When discussing barriers to personal change within the professional learning context, Principal Matthews reported a lack of alignment between the focus areas and her level of experience. She explained:

I feel like quality conversations and things that are relevant to our work [have been meaningful in the principal professional learning sessions], but I do personally feel like my thinking hasn't been pushed as much over the past couple years as it [has been in other districts], but I was also a younger leader. So maybe I was absorbing more at a faster rate

While she found the content of the principal professional learning program relevant, she felt that she was not challenged to engage in new learning about instructional practices on a deep level. As an experienced leader, she found value in the conversations with other principals, but she was already familiar with much of the content. She shared, "I wish we focused on like the actual instructional work a little more," and elaborated on this idea by explaining, "We spend a lot of time on like, 'we've got to do this' and how you're going to log it and track it and do it and we only talk [a little] about the instructional elements." In addition to discussing the instructional leadership practices during the principal professional learning program, Principal Matthews

expressed a desire to learn more about classroom instruction to take her leadership to the next level, stating:

I feel like yes, the principal meetings have absolutely helped lead how I [implement instructional leadership] and following that expectation, but at the same time, I don't know that it's helped me this past year as much with the instruction, like diving deeper into that. And again, maybe it's just me. But that's the only thing I think I would have loved to have had a little bit more of.

Principal Matthews recognizes the importance of high quality instruction, and felt that a focus on more advanced classroom instructional practices, rather than instructional leadership practices that she was already familiar with, could have provided a more transformational learning experience.

Additionally, within the program, Principal Matthews alluded to a lack of connection between the change facilitator and learning agent as another barrier to change. When recounting her experience, she shared:

I feel like Junior High sometimes is like the middle child. In the afternoon session, we'll get a quick check in from [a district leader] but usually, they go straight to high school and do high school things, which is fine. And maybe they're not self-sufficient. I mean, we do fine. Maybe it's just not a priority, but I would love to think that there are still a lot of things that are relevant to all secondary. And so unless they're talking about prom or something, it might be nice [to meet together] because there may be [junior high principals] who eventually want to go to high school.

Feeling as if her learning as a junior high principal was less of a priority than that of the high school principals seemed to hinder her learning during the afternoon breakout sessions.

Similarly, when discussing her school context, Principal Matthews also discussed how a lack of connection between the change facilitator (herself) and learning agents (the teachers) may have been a barrier to organizational change. When reflecting on her role as an instructional leader, Ms. Matthews explained, “I forget sometimes to be the people person because I'm so much about doing the work...so even though I do things for people, sometimes I forget to connect to people.” She acknowledges that, at times, her focus on meeting district expectations can overpower her focus on the human aspect of leadership, which she sees as a barrier to her instructional leadership.

A final barrier that Principal Matthews described presented itself within her school context. With an experienced staff, Ms. Matthews noted that many teachers do not see a sense of urgency to change their teaching practice, making it difficult to lead organizational change. She remarked:

So a lot of our people feel that they are as professionally developed as they need to be. I see that in feedback, with surveys or exit tickets from PD sessions that we do. What follow up do you need? What could we do to support you? And nothing's needed, you know? And that's really difficult when, unless we provide them the feedback through walkthroughs or through other conversations. Truly, a lot of my staff feels very comfortable with what they're doing and that things are just A-Okay. And so I think it is hard to move when they don't think they need it either.

Ms. Matthews describes a sense of complacency among teachers as a barrier to leading organizational change. Especially when, in comparison with other schools, they seem to be ahead in their teaching practices. She explained:

They talk with other people at other schools and they're like, we're so far ahead of where other places are. So it's a curse. Like, am I working on too much or too hard, but then the flip side is we've seen a lot of success with what we're doing, and validation from others, you know, and hopefully, of course, our student data will show that as well.

So while she continues to try to motivate her teachers to continue to grow in their practice, these changes do not seem necessary to many teachers within the school. Additionally, with the added layer of change required by COVID, Ms. Matthews is aware that teachers are under more stress than before. She shared:

Sometimes it is difficult to take [new learning] back to your school and not totally upset the applecart. Knowing that you have to put a ribbon on it for people that aren't always ready to hear it, or feel that they need it, or they're okay with the status quo. So that's difficult to lead.

Principal Matthews acknowledges that as the change facilitator within her school's professional learning environment, she has a responsibility to attend to the needs of the teachers as learning agents within her organizational context. However, it is not always easy to navigate the tension that exists between district expectations for change and teacher readiness for change.

Overall, Principal Matthews described barriers to personal and organizational change, including (a) familiar content that did not present an intellectual challenge, (b) inequity between junior high and high school principals, and (c) a culture of complacency. Although Principal

Matthews experienced multiple barriers, she also recognized meaningful facilitators of change with the professional learning context.

Facilitators

Overall Ms. Matthews felt that the structure, resources, and coherence of the professional learning program led to growth for herself and teachers within her school. First of all, Principal Matthews found the pacing of the professional learning program to be conducive to learning. She explained:

I think they've been chunked well. I think we have enough time working through things. Like we haven't spent too long on something where you kind of get worn out....we might do something for an hour or an hour and a half and then we transition to another piece and so I've appreciated that.

With learning opportunities distributed across seven sessions held throughout the year, change facilitators had the opportunity to chunk the content into multiple learning sessions to maintain learning momentum without overwhelming or boring leaders.

Additionally, Principal Matthews found value in the collaboration among district departments to broaden support across multiple aspects of school leadership. She stated:

I have really appreciated the afternoon sessions to have the breakouts of different topics [led by various district departments]. I think that focusing on some of the ESE things that we've been doing a lot lately has been huge. I think it's a good training piece because more and more, I know that there's a lot of people that don't understand that world. I think that's been a huge step in the right direction for what I think will fully close gaps within our district and make us one.

As a principal with a large population of students receiving Exceptional Student Education (ESE) services, Ms. Matthews saw the opportunity to learn more about supporting students in ESE programs as a facilitator for change both personally and organizationally.

Furthermore, Principal Matthews found value in the instructional leadership resources that were shared during the professional learning program. She appreciated the resources that could be immediately implemented within her school context. Ms. Matthews stated, “I love a PD where I'm learning, I've got things but I'm walking away with resources.” Because she saw these resources as valuable facilitators to change, she suggested developing a more comprehensive resource bank to support school leaders. She shared, “It would be nice to expand upon the bank of resources that are there...And [we can use them] when our team is ready to keep going or if we need to differentiate.” Having resources readily available helped to lighten load for principals and allowed them to more readily translate the learning to teachers.

Alignment between the learning of principals and teachers was the final facilitator of meaningful change identified by Principal Matthews. She described the positive relationship between her experience in attending teacher professional learning sessions that focused on the same priorities as the principal professional learning program, stating:

The [Teacher Leadership Academy] was the closest to a full PLC training I've ever been to, like I've never been to a DuFour workshop or anything related to the PLC structure. Just anything that I've known, learned, participated in, and/or read was really my PLC experience. So going through the [Teacher Leadership Academy] was kind of the biggest thing for me. And so I do think that that maybe was a little more impactful, and going to the Teacher Leadership Academy follow-up sessions throughout the year...But the

[principal meetings] still continued to make sure and remind me of what we needed to focus on.

Principal Matthews appreciated the opportunity to experience learning alongside her teachers at Teacher Leadership Academy, while also being reminded of effective leadership practices to support the implementation of the teacher's learning through the Principal Program. The coherence between the teacher and principal professional learning facilitated more meaningful personal and organizational learning because all members of the learning organization were focused on the same instructional priorities.

Overall, Principal Mathews' experience in the principal professional learning program suggests that a common district focus and expectations shared through professional learning experiences for both teachers and principals is a meaningful support for principals in leading change. This seems especially true in her case, as a school with more experienced teachers, because the alignment of professional learning content creates a more coherent, unified experience, having the potential to foster more purposeful instructional conversations within and across schools. Her experience also suggests the need to integrate more advanced instructional strategies into the principal professional learning program for more experienced principals in order to foster continued growth in instructional leadership practices.

Principal Oliver

"I'm reflective to a fault. In my own personal practice, I hold myself to a high standard, and if one thing doesn't go the way I pictured it, I persevere on that a little bit."

Context

Principal Oliver has served as a Principal of two elementary schools in the Sunshine School District. The first school was a Title I school with higher levels of students with socioeconomic disadvantages, and her current school is more affluent. Furthermore, at this more affluent school, her faculty is composed of many experienced teachers. She shared, “[Many teachers have] been there for 20 years. People look to them for institutional knowledge, and this is the way we've always done things.” Principal Oliver acknowledges that there are advantages to having an experienced faculty, although this experience also has the potential to present challenges when leading change, if not navigated intentionally.

While many schools have large numbers of experienced teachers, a factor unique to Principal Oliver’s leadership context is serving as principal in the school where she started her teaching career. In fact, many of the teachers she taught with as a beginning teacher are still there. When discussing how she navigated this transition back to the school where she began her teaching career, Ms. Oliver shared, “a lot of them felt like I was their surrogate daughter when I left [teaching to go into administration] and now I'm coming back as, in their mind, the boss.” Principal Oliver said she and her teachers had to learn to navigate the tension between who she was *then*, as a young teacher, and who she is *now*, as the school leader. She explained:

leading a school that I taught at has been a huge challenge for me. And it has taken the five years that I've been there to really get my footing as a leader and separate myself from being their peer. Many of the teachers who were there saw me as a 22 year old beginning teacher, and that made the leading of the change difficult...So I found it

difficult going back because I had 10 years in administration, where I learned and grew and I would be a completely different teacher if I went back in the classroom.

Principal Oliver has been keenly aware of how she is perceived by her teachers, and has worked hard over the past five years to establish credibility so that she is recognized as a respected instructional leader.

With a reflective approach to learning, Ms. Oliver actively engaged in the principal professional learning program and experienced personal change as an instructional leader, while also successfully leading organizational change within her school in alignment with the three district priorities, emphasizing the focus area of strengthening professional learning communities.

Change

Through her engagement in the program, Principal Oliver experienced and enacted changes to build upon, and strengthen, the existing relationships within the school, cultivating a more collaborative approach to professional learning focused on the district's instructional vision, led primarily by teachers. In the following sections, I describe the changes in knowledge, beliefs and practices Principal Oliver reported as a result of her participation in the program to answer the following sub-question of RQ1:

- a. What changes in knowledge do principals identify in each area?
- b. What changes in beliefs do principals identify in each area?
- c. What changes in practices do principals identify in each area?

Knowledge. Through her experience in the yearlong principal professional learning program, Principal Oliver expanded her knowledge of ways to: (a) structure learning teams within her school's professional learning community, (b) lead the district's instructional vision,

and (c) foster a common vision and focus among her faculty. Although these topics were not new to her, the opportunity to collaborate with other leaders on a regular basis allowed Ms. Oliver to deepen her understanding in these areas.

One challenge that Principal Oliver experienced when establishing teams within her professional learning community was that some teachers teaching the same content in the same grade level held very different pedagogical beliefs, making it a challenge for them to work together professionally. Knowing that meaningful collaboration is essential for teachers' professional growth, she sought input from other school principals during the principal professional learning program. Principal Oliver explained:

Talking to another colleague at a smaller school, they did a content [learning team] of fourth, fifth, and sixth grade ELA [teachers] and fourth, fifth, and sixth grade math [teachers]. And I thought that was a great idea. I should do that at my place as well, because we have larger teams, but the [grade level] teams don't really see eye to eye professionally, and they have struggled historically with planning and learning together. They like each other as people, not as professionals. If you add more to that mix, there's a better chance of them learning together.

Through the collaborative experiences focused on strengthening professional learning communities during the principal professional learning program, Ms. Oliver expanded her knowledge of structuring learning teams so that teachers would find their collaborative learning experiences more meaningful.

Furthermore, Principal Oliver's knowledge of the instructional vision was enhanced. She learned more about the value of pairing success criteria with learning targets to help her experienced teachers continue to develop their instructional skills. Ms. Oliver shared:

We talked about learning targets and all of those things before, but I think adding the success criteria piece was pretty powerful. Not all of my teachers do that. And that was new learning for me as a leader. This is the next level we can look at, you know. This will also help extend or deepen children's learning.

This focus on defining success criteria for each learning target was valuable for teacher learning because it led to a deeper understanding of the purpose of learning targets and provided an opportunity for professional conversation around defining the specific outcomes for students during each lesson, something many teachers had not done collectively before this year.

Principal Oliver went on to explain:

I think the relevant success criteria has been a huge piece because that was something that we were lacking before. Everybody, for the most part, compliantly had the learning target on the board, but not everybody has a clear understanding of what that is. But adding the success criteria really helped them understand what the learning target was, because asking 'what do I want them to know at the end of our time together?' makes teachers think, 'Is this a realistic goal? Is this a bite-sized goal? Is this attainable? And does this hold them to the high academic standard?'

By focusing on clarifying outcomes for each lesson through learning targets and success criteria, Principal Oliver was able to translate her personal learning into organizational change within her school.

Ms. Oliver also found the principal professional learning program to be valuable because it helped her to maintain consistency and focus throughout the year, something that she did not do as well with in previous years. She acknowledged:

I'm keeping my focus on the teaching and the learning because I have a known framework. It kept me focused on that at our principal meetings. I would go back to my building. I would do walkthroughs. I would be interested in the data on the amount of walkthroughs happening after a principal meeting.

The ongoing meetings throughout the year, with a consistent pattern of looking at data and discussing instructional leadership moves kept instructional leadership on Principal Oliver's radar. She went on to explain:

We're able to have a common focus and a common language, you know, that this month, I'm coming in to look for learning targets and success criteria. You know, that next month, I'm also going to be looking for that, and I'm going to be looking for the next piece.

The consistent focus and expectations shared during the principal professional learning program motivated her to use the learning in her daily work with teachers, thus developing knowledge *in practice* (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999) of effective instructional leadership practices.

Beliefs. Principal Oliver's beliefs were also influenced by her experiences in the professional learning program. Now, more than in the past, she recognizes the importance of fostering collective leadership through relationships with teachers, and providing differentiated support for teachers in areas that are most meaningful to them.

To develop a culture of collective leadership among her experienced teachers, Principal Oliver expects teachers to be the leaders in their teams, while she supports them from the side. She shared:

It helps that we only check in [on the learning teams]. We don't go and run the meeting. We go down there to answer a question or to just kind of see what I see. We treat it almost like a walk through. We're going to walk through your PLCs. You're going to pretend like we're not there.

Through the principal professional learning program, Ms. Oliver has come to believe that engaging in feedback conversations with teams about their collaborative practices is just as important as feedback conversations about classroom instruction.

This focus on prioritizing teacher leadership has provided teacher leaders at her school with valuable learning opportunities and allows teachers to lead the work in a way that is meaningful for their team's learning. Ms. Oliver explained:

[The expectation of teacher leadership] has helped empower the teacher leaders to continue to lead the work in their groups. Now they will give out a Mayday, 'Mayday Mayday. I need you to help me! Because our group is not understanding common assessments and what that means. Can you come and speak to that?' Absolutely. We can come and speak to that.

By positioning teachers as the leaders, their professionalism and expertise are recognized and utilized. Additionally, teachers are more empowered to make instructional decisions that target their students' specific needs. Principal Oliver explained her belief-shift to a more teacher-focused leadership style of shared decision making by stating:

It was hard to release [leadership responsibility]. I don't ever want to make more work for people, specifically teachers. And so having that shared decision making is sometimes hard for me, because I'm like, 'It's okay. You don't have to do that. I'll do it.' And then the flip side of that is [the teachers] don't feel empowered. So that's something that I've had to learn as a leader. That people really do want to help. It's not adding something else to their plate.

Recognizing the experience and wisdom of her teachers, Ms. Oliver has learned that she is not giving them more work when positioning them as leaders. Rather, she is empowering them to enact their purpose as educators.

A key belief that has allowed her to foster collective leadership within her school is valuing the powerful role of relationships in professional learning. Prioritizing conversations and spending time alongside teachers in learning teams has led to increased learning throughout her school. She explained, "We were able to spend more time in their PLCs. We were able to spend more time professionally with [the teachers]. So I think that contributed to [change] as well." Showing teachers that they are a priority creates a supportive environment for change. Furthermore, these interactions also lead to meaningful instructional conversations. Principal Oliver shared:

Here, it's a lot of one-on-one conversations. Then you have to bring it to the small group, and then you have to bring it to the whole group. You start with your coalition of the willing. Here's what's coming. I need you to help me roll this out. Thinking in your mind, how are you going to really hit home the important points with the naysayers, and the people who are resistant to change?

Believing in the importance of meeting each teacher where they are and leading change in a way that honors their professionalism, Principal Oliver prioritizes relationships as an instructional leader.

In this way, she developed a belief in the need to differentiate support for teachers throughout her school by holding high expectations and investing in all teachers. She shared this belief by stating, “You have to meet teachers where they are.” She went on to explain:

I like to spend more time in the teachers' classrooms who necessarily don't need a lot of coaching...my goal for them is to make them consciously competent. And so I really spend a lot of time working with them. ‘Okay, talk me through what you were thinking.

How did you plan that?’ [I expect] them to be able to voice why they did what they did.

With an experienced faculty, it can be challenging to find ways to help teachers learn and change, but by showing teachers she is interested in their practice and invested in their growth, Principal Oliver has stimulated a learning culture within her school.

Practices. Principal Oliver’s experience in the principal professional learning program motivated her to implement instructional leadership practices to strengthen her school’s professional learning community by maintaining a consistent focus on providing differentiated support for teacher teams as they learned to engage in productive professional dialogue to learn from one another. When reflecting on her instructional leadership practice, she explained:

[Collaboration within learning teams] is a piece that I feel much more competent in, helping to lead that work with them. Knowing that your conversation today helped you be a better teacher...It helps you look forward to the next time you're meeting together.

That's going to deepen your learning as a teacher, which will impact student achievement.

And I saw it in classrooms. Even our naysayer on one of the teams, who, the team is like ‘please don't let her be on my team next year.’ I saw evidence of [the instructional conversations] in her classroom, and I would go back to the team leader and I would say ‘I know that she is not communicating very kindly. But the work that you're doing can be seen in her classroom. So you're breaking through that shell a little bit. I mean, a lot actually, if we're going to be honest.’ But [supporting teacher collaboration in learning teams] is something that I really, really focused on and took hold of and changed my practice this year.

This consistent focus on collaborative professional learning has established the school's structure of functioning as a professional learning community, and Ms. Oliver is prepared to support each team as they continue to deepen their collaborative practices. She shared:

We are doing it, but we are not all doing it *well*. We don't have all teams looking deeply into the data, but they are doing very similar to what we're doing: tackling big topics, chewing, digesting, processing, changing their teaching practice based on their conversation. So the student data piece is the next part of that. It is the next step, but we weren't there yet.

She acknowledges that professional learning takes time, and she has a plan for supporting learning teams in their next steps for growth. As part of this plan, she continuously makes time to work closely with teachers, checking in on their needs and involving them in shared decision making. When reflecting on her support for teachers, she stated:

Each team was facing a different challenge. And they wanted to talk about it with me,

separate from the rest of the group. There were things that the whole group had to talk about. And then there were things: ‘Okay, well, how do I do this? How do I do that?’ So it was problem solving with them individually that really created the system of checking in with him.

Employing a supporting stance, Principal Oliver is taking a more focused and intentional approach to leading change with teachers in the district’s areas of focus as a result of her experience in the principal professional learning program. She explained:

I've heard you can't drink out of a firehose, so I had to be very careful as to how I delivered those expectations. Because I can't expect you to change overnight. You've been doing it for 20 years. It's going to take you more than a day to get out of that habit and change that mindset.

She carefully considered what she learned in the principal professional learning program and developed intentional plans for how to most effectively translate this learning for teachers within her unique school context. Principal Oliver shared, “When I learn something new, I have to think about the context and how I am going to effectively lead and teach the teachers in my charge. Like differentiation.” She recognizes that effective professional learning for her teachers is not one-size-fits-all, however, she has also come to understand the value of having a unified school focus. To continue to deepen her faculty’s instructional expertise, Ms. Oliver shared, “My next step is really getting their [PLC] agendas and their artifacts and looking at them.” Now that teachers are working collaboratively in learning teams, Principal Oliver is positioned to support teachers in getting more granular in their collaborative work by looking at PLC agendas to explore the specific collaborative actions teams are taking together and discussing how to

most effectively use student work to inform instructional decisions. Through differentiated support focused on supporting a common vision, Ms. Oliver is leading organizational change within her school.

These changes in Ms. Oliver's knowledge, beliefs, and practices were influenced by the barriers and facilitators to change that she experienced within the program. In the following sections, I will answer the following sub-question of RQ1:

- d. What barriers and facilitators to change do principals identify in each area?

Barriers

While Principal Oliver described worthwhile changes to her knowledge, beliefs and practices, she also illuminated barriers to change that she experienced as part of the professional learning program. While she found value in collaborating with other principals in a small group setting, she felt that large group discussions were not as meaningful. She explained, “When you get in a larger group, sometimes the voices get drowned out, or we aren't as free to share our thinking in a larger setting. Almost when politics are at play.” Therefore, when designing professional learning experiences, prioritizing small group conversations and minimizing whole group discussions may lead to more learning for principals.

Additionally, Ms. Oliver found value in maintaining instructional coherence, and found it distracting and demotivating to interrupt the learning process with unrelated announcements and information. She commented, “You know how I feel about hijacking a meeting at the end, and you lose the learning momentum.” While there is always important information to be communicated from the district to school principals, Ms. Oliver explained that sharing this information at the end of the principal professional learning sessions can detract from the

learning experience, leaving her more focused on the information shared during the announcements and less motivated by the learning experiences. Therefore, being intentional about where and how this information is communicated can remove a potential barrier to change for principals.

Finally, similar to the barrier described by Principal Matthews and Principal Holbrock, Principal Oliver shared her perception of an imbalance of power among principals within the district. She used the following analogy to describe this barrier, “[High school principals are] fortune 500 CEOs and we are mom and pop shops.” When leaders at all levels are not perceived to have equal value, a barrier emerges from the lack of equitable interactions between the change facilitators and learning agents, potentially minimizing the impact of the professional learning experience.

Overall, Principal Oliver described barriers related to inequity of voice and incoherence. However, she also described facilitators that led to changes in her instructional leadership practice.

Facilitators

Given the inherent complexity of professional learning, the barriers experienced by Ms. Oliver intermingled with robust facilitators, ultimately leading to changes in knowledge, beliefs and practice. The influential facilitators Ms. Oliver described include: (a) authentic learning experiences that expect principal agency, (b) a consistent focus that fostered accountability, and (c) collaborative learning opportunities with other school leaders.

When describing experiences that were particularly motivating for her, Principal Oliver identified opportunities for authentic learning that were immediately applicable to her context.

She shared:

I think it was at one of our principal meetings that really ignited in me...It almost gave me the freedom to say, 'I don't have to do it the way they've always done it.' Having the freedom to say 'nope, here. These are now the things that you're going to be responsible for as a team leader. You have to lead the learning of your team, and that's going to look different.'

She saw this action step as a realistic way to facilitate organizational change within her school, and followed this guidance to strategically select team leaders to be instructional leaders. Ms. Oliver also explained how the learning experiences were directly related to her role as an instructional leader and helped her maintain focus and motivation throughout the school year.

She explained:

I'm keeping my focus on the teaching and the learning because I have a known framework. It kept me focused on that at our principal meetings. I would go back to my building. I would do walkthroughs. I would be interested in the data on the amount of walkthroughs happening after a principal meeting.

Knowing that authentic actions were being taken by principals throughout the district in the three areas of focus, Principal Oliver was more eager to engage in these instructional leadership practices within her own context. Furthermore, having clear resources designed to support the areas of focus facilitated both personal and organizational change. She shared:

I've appreciated our learning in this way. I like to focus. I like the teacher indicators

and student indicators on our sheet. It helps us lead the conversation here at school. And to know that that's happening across the district gives us some power.

The collective focus on the same priorities, using the same instructional leadership resources as other leaders motivated Principal Oliver to activate agency within herself and foster agency within the teachers at her school. She explained:

[The quarterly focus documents] give me different ways that I can talk to teachers, it helps me differentiate more for them. I'm excited about the upcoming rubric. I think that'll help us a lot. I think putting [actionable expectations] on paper really does help teachers strive. For those teachers who are kind of middle of the road but need a little push, 'Oh, I can do that. I want to get to that next level.' And the teachers who are driven will want to also be on that level.

Cultivating a growth mindset throughout the school has been more attainable for Principal Oliver with the resources shared during the principal professional learning program.

Additionally, Principal Oliver described the consistent focus on the district priorities as a facilitator of change. As a result of the coherent message over time, she explained, "I was more able to keep my focus on what was actually important." Principal Oliver went on to share, "I think the fact that we didn't change what we were looking for, we just went deeper was very helpful. 'You're already doing this. We're going to take the next step.'" She found value in the consistent structure of the principal professional learning sessions and appreciated the review of walkthrough data at each meeting. She stated:

It was a good way to keep myself accountable, and my team accountable, because you

do get mired down in the firefighting of school. But knowing that [the walkthrough data] was going to be looked at, when it's when something's monitored, it's done...I don't know if anybody looked at me specifically, you know, but I saw who was on top and I saw who was on bottom.

Having a focus, and staying consistent during the principal professional learning program was valuable for Ms. Oliver's personal change. However, the consistent focus on the three areas of focus was also instrumental in helping her translate her personal change into organizational change. She commented:

I liked that we knew the expectations going in. 'This is what we're going to be talking about. These are look-fors. This is what the conversation will be around.' I think that did help us, in my building, focus on the target of the month, or whatever the target of the quarter was, because then I would go and include that in my weekly newsletter. 'Don't forget [during] walkthroughs this month, this is the focus that we're going to be looking for', and that also drove my instruction to my teachers in the whole group setting. 'Here's what we're going to be looking at every quarter'.

As Principal Oliver implies, when the change facilitator of a professional learning program understands the learning environment and maintains a consistent focus on the innovation, they can design learning experiences that provide coherence, consistency, structure, focus, and accountability with realistic expectations of small changes over time.

Along with focus, collaboration is another beneficial facilitator of change experienced by Principal Oliver within the professional learning program. In fact, she attributes most of her

changes to the interactions that took place when principals interacted with one another in small groups, sharing:

[Our learning] was very conversational. What did you see when you were in classrooms? What did I see? I think we need to hit this indicator hard, or I think we need to do a little reminder on what this looks like. And that helped my instructional leadership.

Principal Oliver found value in the conversations, and commented, “I love the conversational tone. I loved problem solving with a small group and then sharing out with a big group.” And her learning was not limited to teaching and learning during these collaborative experiences with other principals. Principal Oliver also described operational learning, explaining:

Even sitting in a room talking about scheduling [with other principals] is helpful. Because...I have 10 minutes of sixth grade coming back from lunch. I need those 10 minutes to be purposeful. What can I do? Can I move something around? Having somebody else to talk it through with in a smaller group is really helpful.

Engaging in collaborative conversations cultivated personal change for Ms. Oliver during the principal professional learning program. As a result of these authentic, focused, collaborative experiences, she shared:

I think about myself as an instructional leader differently, [by asking myself] ‘how can I get better at leading instructionally?’ and having the tools to do that. I would say in years past, we have spent a lot of time doing walkthroughs for walkthrough sake because they're looked at [by district leaders], but this year, it felt more meaningful because we had a specific goal and task, and it related to our PLCs and it was all connected, so it helped us keep the focus on [supporting our three priorities]. I was never at a loss for

what am I going to do when we get to whole group because of our work in the principal meetings.

The coherence and relevance of the learning experiences helped Ms. Oliver to find significance in the learning experiences and translate her learning into meaningful learning opportunities for teachers within her school.

Overall, Principal Oliver's experience in the principal professional learning program suggests that designing and facilitating authentic learning experiences that expect principal agency and provide a consistent focus were instrumental in creating a sense of respectful accountability for Ms. Oliver, and led to meaningful changes in her practice and that of her teachers. Furthermore, her experience highlights the importance of valuing all voices through meaningful collaboration.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented the findings of each individual case in this multi-case study to answer RQ1: *How do principals experience a yearlong professional learning program focused on implementing the district's instructional vision through an asset orientation, strengthening professional learning communities, and fostering high quality literacy instruction?* through the related sub questions. An overview of each case can be seen in Table 4.1. Each principal engaged in the professional learning experience from their own unique leadership orientation, and identified a range of changes to their knowledge, beliefs, and practices as a result of their participation in the yearlong principal professional learning program. While there were many differences between the cases, there were also common findings that emerged across all cases. In the next chapter, I will describe these common findings as I elaborate on RQ1 and answer

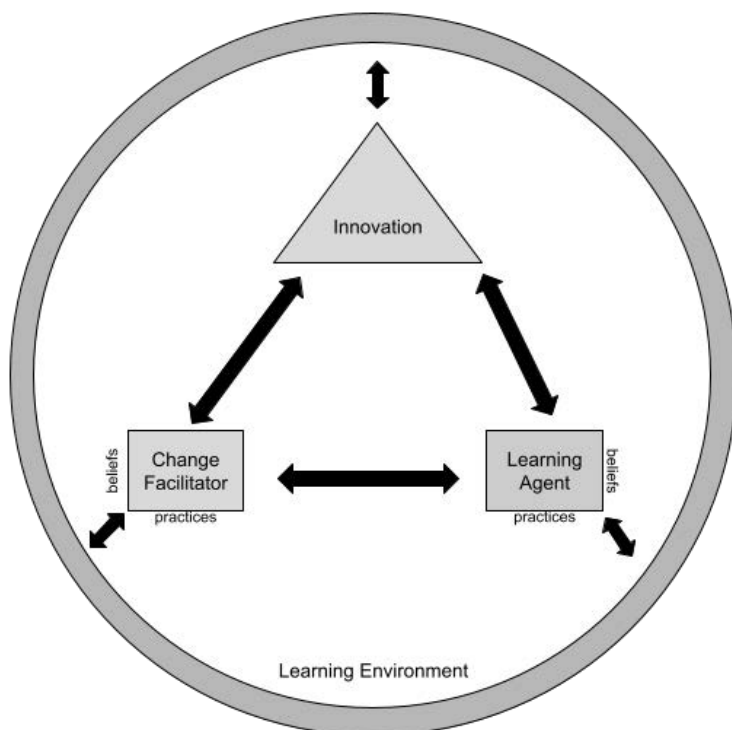
RQ2: *What are the critical connection points between professional learning and change within the program?*

CHAPTER 5: INTEGRATED CASE RESULTS

Each principal participating in this professional learning program has a unique set of background experiences and leads a school with its own unique culture. As such, each principal experienced change through his/her personal lens of specific experiences and contexts, resulting in unique changes in knowledge, beliefs, and practices among the four cases. However, despite these differences, common findings emerged across each case related to the key players of change in a professional learning context (Figure 5.1). In this chapter, I will describe the common findings that emerged across all cases in each area: the innovations, the professional learning environment, the change facilitators, and the learning agents (Table 5.1) to elaborate on *RQ1: How do principals experience a yearlong professional learning program focused on implementing the district's instructional vision through an asset orientation, strengthening professional learning communities, and fostering high quality literacy instruction?* Then, I will answer *RQ2: What are the critical connection points between professional learning and change within the program?* Finally, I will explore and discuss the three themes that emerged from these findings and will connect them to, and build upon, the extant literature on professional learning and change.

Figure 5.1

Change in a Professional Learning Context

**Table 5.1**

Overview of Common Findings Related to the Key Players of Change in a Professional Learning Context

Key Player	Definition in this study	Common Findings
Innovation/Learning Priority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementing the district's instructional vision through an asset orientation • Strengthening professional learning communities • Fostering high quality literacy instruction 	Consistent Focus Collective Nature
Learning Environment	Yearlong, collaboratively designed and facilitated district principal professional learning program aligned to the district priorities	Collaborative Experiences Consistent Structure Session Frequency

Change Facilitator	District facilitator(s) during the professional learning program	Cohesive Learning Segments Emphasis on Praxis
Learning Agent	School principal during the professional learning program	Unique Learning Needs Learning from Each Other

Across Case Experiences with Innovation

The three innovations of the principal professional learning program were: (a) implementing the district’s instructional vision through an asset orientation, (b) strengthening professional learning communities, and (c) fostering high quality literacy instruction. These innovations were collaboratively identified by a team of district and school based leaders by considering the unique context of the Sunshine School District. While each principal experienced different degrees of change in each area of innovation (Figure 4.1), there were common findings that emerged across all cases in response to *RQ1: How do principals experience a yearlong professional learning program focused on implementing the district’s instructional vision through an asset orientation, strengthening professional learning communities, and fostering high quality literacy instruction?* Overall, the principals in each case found the three innovations valuable in providing a *consistent focus* throughout the principal professional learning program and they appreciated that other principals throughout the district were also focused on the same innovations.

Although the principals found the innovations *valuable*, one of the foremost findings regarding the innovation is that not every principal found the innovations to be *transformational*. While all principals found the innovations relevant and meaningful, some did not report *transformational* change because they had prior experiences with these topics. Nonetheless, all principals experienced some changes in the areas of innovation, albeit a continuation of previous

work in some cases. In light of this finding, learning priority may be a more accurate term to describe the innovation in a professional learning program because the innovation is not universally innovative across every case. Rather, it is the interactions between each unique learning agent and the innovation that seem to determine whether or not the learning priority is truly innovative. Therefore, for the remainder of this discussion, I will use the term learning priority in place of innovation for a more accurate description of the topics of focus.

Although the learning priorities were not transformational for *all* principals, they provided a *consistent focus* throughout the program and helped principals determine a general direction in which to lead their schools. Principal Matthews stated, “I think [the principal professional learning] has given direction to what it is [we can do achieve the vision].” With the breadth of priorities principals are responsible for overseeing, having a consistent focus helped leaders to streamline the decision making process in the area of instructional leadership, resulting in principals more readily taking action to lead organizational change within their schools focused on the *learning priorities*. Additionally, Principal Oliver stated, “In years past, we have spent a lot of time doing walkthroughs for walkthrough’s sake...this year, it felt more meaningful because we had a specific goal and task and it related to our PLCs and it was all connected.” The cohesive nature of the learning priorities, which remained a focus over the course of the entire school year, led to a better understanding of the purpose behind each learning priority and helped principals see how they could be leveraged collectively to make a positive difference in student learning.

Furthermore, principals appreciated that other principals were also focused on the same learning priorities. Reviewing district walkthrough data and participating in principal PLC

teams at each meeting maintained a *consistent focus* on the learning priorities and created a sense of connectedness among principals, a role that has the potential to be very lonely. Mr. Arthur explained, “I thought it was good to focus in on those specific four principles [of the instructional vision], and to focus in on what we see throughout the district and in our schools.” The coherence established through the *collective nature* of focusing on the same learning priorities across schools provided a sense of unity among leaders and teachers, serving as a facilitator for change. Furthermore, Principal Oliver shared, “To know that [the same focus is] happening across the district gives us some power.” Knowing that teachers across schools were hearing the same message from their principals gave the learning priorities credibility, serving as a facilitator for organizational change.

Collaboratively developing meaningful learning priorities among district and school-based educators, while maintaining a *consistent focus* on these priorities at the district, school, and classroom levels cultivated a sense of connectedness and credibility among SSD educators, resulting in personal and organizational change. Although collaboratively developed learning priorities proved to be an important feature of change within the professional learning program, they were situated in a meaningful learning environment, creating conditions for personal change. The principals in this study identified three common aspects of the learning environment that contributed to these changes.

Across Case Experiences with the Learning Environment

The learning environment in the yearlong professional learning program was intentionally designed through collaboration among district leaders, taking into consideration the current resources and time available within the organization in order to maximize the

development of professional capital in alignment with effective professional learning features identified in the literature (Darling-Hammond et. al., 2017; Desimone, 2009; Ellsworth, 2000; Fullan, 2016). Adjustments were made to the learning environment throughout the program in response to feedback from school-based leaders. As a result, all principals found the *collaborative nature*, the *consistency of structure*, and the *frequency of sessions* within the learning environment to be valuable change facilitators. In this section, I discuss these common findings to elaborate on *RQ1: How do principals experience a yearlong professional learning program focused on implementing the district's instructional vision through an asset orientation, strengthening professional learning communities, and fostering high quality literacy instruction?*

With *collaboration* as an integral element of the professional learning program, principals had frequent opportunities within each session to engage in discussion, ask questions of one another, and share ideas and successes with other principals doing the similar work within their schools. All principals shared that they learned from others throughout the program. Principal Holbrock shared, "It's always helpful to me to listen to my colleagues," and Mr. Arthur explained, "I think I was able to get more insight from other schools." Similarly, Principal Matthews stated, "I also really love the opportunities to just talk with my colleagues," and Ms. Oliver said, "[The sessions] were very conversational...and that helped my instructional leadership." Each principal found value in the *collaborative experiences*, and the frequent opportunities for meaningful conversation facilitated personal changes and led to organizational changes in each case.

Additionally, the *consistent structure* was another aspect of the learning environment that was valued by the principals. Principal Matthews explained, "I think they've been chunked well.

There's been enough time working through things. We haven't spent too long on something where you kind of get worn out.” Similarly, Principal Holbrock shared, “You’re presenting it...deliberate, intentional, and in segments...[we] see the importance when it’s like that and you keep people from getting overwhelmed.” By spending a portion of every meeting focused on each learning priority in a consistent format, the principals engaged in meaningful learning experiences that they could then translate into organizational change within their schools.

In addition to the *consistent structure* within each session, the principals found the *frequency of the meetings* throughout the yearlong professional learning program to be beneficial for experiencing and leading change. Principal Holbrock articulated this sentiment by sharing:

It's easy to get all caught up in all of the things that don't really push student achievement, so having that monthly meeting, that monthly refocus [to look at the walkthrough data]...I think that is helpful in itself. Because here's the thing, if [we met] quarterly, that's a lot of lost time to get caught up in other things. [Frequent meetings] give us that opportunity to stay focused and not lose momentum.

Recognizing the complexity of the principal’s role, Principal Holbrock articulated this common viewpoint held by the principals in each case by stating that the *frequency of the meetings* allowed them to reconnect with each other, recalibrate their focus on instructional leadership in a timely manner, and continue to move forward in leading organizational change within their schools.

Monthly collaborative learning sessions with a *consistent structure* allowed for personal change to take place within an established framework intentionally designed to align with the learning priorities. Through the ongoing attention to the learning environment, the change

facilitators were able to create conditions conducive to individual and organizational change for the learning agents. In every case, principals noted commonalities regarding their experience with the change facilitators within the professional learning program.

Across Case Experiences with the Change Facilitators

The principal professional learning program was designed and facilitated by a team of change facilitators, composed of district leaders from multiple departments. In this section, I discuss the common experiences with the change facilitators to elaborate on *RQI: How do principals experience a yearlong professional learning program focused on implementing the district's instructional vision through an asset orientation, strengthening professional learning communities, and fostering high quality literacy instruction?* Throughout the course of this program, the principals in each case recognized two key attributes of the facilitation that was beneficial to their individual and organizational change: *meaningful learning segments that built on previous learning, and an emphasis on praxis.*

Overall, the principals found value in the way the change facilitators designed and led the learning experiences, with each segment of learning building on the previous. Principal Holbrock acknowledges this by explaining, "I felt that they were very meaningful and I felt that they built on last year's [learning]." The continuity of learning helped provide a sense of consistency during a culture of change. Furthermore, Oliver also shared an appreciation of the *consistent and connected learning experiences*, stating "I liked that we knew the expectations going in. This is what we're going to be talking about. These are 'Look-Fors'. This is what the conversation will be around." Knowing that each learning experience would be facilitated in a similar manner, focused on the same learning priorities, and would build on the prior

experiences, the learning was meaningful for the principals in each case, leading to personal change. Additionally, Principal Arthur articulated how he planned to follow a similar model when leading organizational change within his school in the upcoming school year, explaining:

[Next year] we'll start the year off with learning targets and checks for understanding but then we'll get into it with our PLCs, similar to what we talked about this year...to talk about the data [ensuring] that we're giving the right assessments to match [the learning targets].

Recognizing the value of building on previous learning for a *coherent professional learning experience*, Principal Arthur, along with the other principals, used a similar approach when leading organizational change within their schools by sharing information in meaningful learning segments over the course of the year.

Another common finding that emerged among all cases was the change facilitators' *emphasis on praxis*. Each principal found value in the expectation to translate learning from the professional learning sessions into action within their schools, and appreciated the tools they received to support the learning priorities. Principal Holbrock stated, "I think that the way it's presented to us [is meaningful] and the way you give us the tools, you know, and we practice some of what you demonstrate at those meetings." With a focus on *praxis*, the learning facilitators designed and led active learning experiences for principals that equipped them to lead organizational change within their schools. Principal Holbrock went on to explain, "by us doing our own PLC at the principals meeting, it made me accountable and more focused on what the teachers were doing. Because I knew I had to come back and have a conversation about what was happening." The ongoing expectation of taking action after each session, and reflecting on

the action at the following session created conditions to inspire individual and organizational change within each case. Similarly, Principal Oliver shared, “I like the teacher indicators and student indicators on our [instructional vision documents]. It helps us lead the conversation here at school. And to know that that's happening across the district gives us some power.” Principal Oliver is motivated and equipped to lead organizational change focused on the three learning priorities as a result of the change facilitators’ *emphasis on praxis*. Furthermore, Principal Arthur expressed his preference for collaboration around authentic experiences he faces as a leader, by stating, “When you give us time where it's all of us together, we tend to gravitate towards answering those real issues.” The practical nature of the learning facilitated by change facilitators was a common finding that emerged across all cases.

The collaborative and responsive efforts of the change facilitators led to meaningful learning experiences for the learning agents throughout the principal professional learning program. The change facilitators’ design and facilitation of *cohesive learning segments* with an *emphasis on praxis* led to personal and organizational change. And while each learning agent experienced the professional learning program differently, similar perspectives emerged among the learning agents across the findings of each case.

Across Case Experiences as a Learning Agent

As each principal shared their experiences with change, they provided insight into their perspective as a learning agent within the program. In this section, I discuss the common experiences of principals as a learning agent to elaborate on *RQ1: How do principals experience a yearlong professional learning program focused on implementing the district’s instructional vision through an asset orientation, strengthening professional learning communities, and*

fostering high quality literacy instruction? While each principal expressed *unique learning needs* based on their individualized educational backgrounds, they also shared a common experience of *learning from the other learning agents* within the program because they were engaged in similar work.

A consistent finding across all cases was the unique nature of each principal's educational background and learning preferences. Although each principal found value in the program, their unique combination of background experiences, educational contexts, and learning preferences resulted in each experiencing personal change differently. During the second interview, when discussing what they would keep the same and what they would change about the principal professional learning program, principals shared a range of ideas. Principal Matthews expressed a desire for professional learning focused on more nuanced instructional practices so that she can better support teachers in each content area, while Principal Arthur shared that he would prefer to engage in classroom walkthroughs alongside other principals in their schools for a more job-embedded approach to learning ways to initiate meaningful feedback conversations with teachers. These findings indicate that each learning agent is unique, and has an individualized set of learning interests. Principal Matthews summed this up succinctly by stating, "Just like we talked about differentiating PD for teachers, it's the same thing for admin." Although the principals expressed their appreciation for a collective focus on the same learning priorities throughout the district, they shared a desire for differentiated learning experiences based on their individual needs and school contexts. Similarly, when it comes to differentiating for organizational learning, Principal Oliver recognized the need for differentiated learning

experiences within her school based on the individualized needs of the learning agents, explaining:

Anytime I'm learning something new, or talking about something that is challenging my thinking, I think to myself, how am I going to roll that out at the place that I'm leading? I've been a leader of two schools and it's two different ways. I think as a leader, you have to understand how your people receive information. Because if you don't know how they receive information, you're not going to be able to convey the information and then lead the learning effectively.

Acknowledging that one size does not fit all, Principal Oliver understands the importance of getting to know the learning agents in order to better understand how they will most effectively interact with the learning priorities. Principal Arthur also recognizes the need for differentiation by explaining, “I can’t go into every single class with that walkthrough form and treat everyone the same way because we are not all there. It’s just like kids.” As the change facilitator within his school, he recognizes that each learning agent is unique and that differentiation is a necessary component for supporting change. Although each principal’s school culture is unique and requires a degree of differentiation, another commonality across all cases is that all principals found value in learning from each other, which was possible because they were engaged in similar work focused on the three learning priorities.

Each principal across all four cases attributed some degree of individual and organizational change to the opportunities they had to *learn from other principals* within the professional learning program. Because they were focused on the same learning priorities, principals were engaged in similar instructional leadership experiences, and each expressed an

appreciation for the opportunity to learn from others. Principal Arthur shared, “I was able to get more insight from other schools on how they were using [the reading program], learning about the pullout lessons they had for small groups... I think that was important. That was a good part.” Expanding access to ideas generated from a broader pool of collective experiences by learning from other principals, including ideas shared by teachers at other schools, has led to more impactful changes in knowledge, beliefs, and practices. Additionally, sharing across grade bands has also been beneficial. Principal Oliver shared, “I love being with secondary and even understanding a little bit of their perspective.”

While each principal acknowledged a lack of coherence between elementary and secondary throughout the program, the opportunities they had to collaborate across levels in school feeder patterns were valued. Principal Arthur shared an appreciation for working with principals from other schools within his community, explaining, “I can get a lot more having conversations with [the junior high feeder principal] and with [the elementary feeder principal]. We have the same kids, the same issues, the same parents so ‘how can we come to a solution?’” The opportunity to collaborate with other principals in the same community, although at different levels, was valuable for expanding perspective and identifying solutions to similar problems. Overall, the principals in each case found value in being part of a team of principals engaged in similar instructional leadership practices. Having the opportunity to learn from the various experiences of other learning agents about real issues the principals encountered was a valuable change facilitator within the program.

Critical Connection Points between Professional Learning and Change

Overall, five key categories emerged through the individual and common findings about change in a professional learning context: (a) collective leadership, (b) coherence, (c) collaboration, (d) differentiation, and (e) praxis. These categories identify critical connection points between professional learning and change and can be used to describe and understand the overall experiences of the principals in the yearlong professional learning program in response to RQ2: *What are the critical connection points between professional learning and change within the program?* In each case, findings emerged related to all five categories, and Table 5.2 illustrates the findings that emerged regarding the design and facilitation of the professional learning program, as well as in the way each principal led change within their school.

Table 5.2

Critical Connection Points between Professional Learning and Change

Category	Design and Facilitation of Professional Learning Program	Principals Leading Change within Schools
Collective Leadership	The Theory of Action indicated collaborative design and input from principals.	Principals engaged with teacher leaders and leveraged teacher strengths.
Coherence	Learning experiences focused on the three learning priorities built on previous learning, and barriers indicated a lack of coherence among elementary and secondary expectations.	District learning priorities were translated to school-based learning experiences to enhance learning for teachers and students.
Collaboration	Principals had multiple opportunities for collaboration within each session.	Principals created conditions for teacher collaboration.
Differentiation	Principals worked in self-selected PLC teams based on common grade level content focus, and barriers indicated a need for greater	Principals adapted support for teachers based on readiness and need.

	differentiation.	
Praxis	Program focused on relevant learning priorities with an expectation of implementation within schools.	Principals focused on relevant learning priorities with an expectation of implementation within classrooms.

Collective Leadership

Collective leadership proved to be a meaningful aspect of the design and facilitation of the professional learning program. The theory of action indicates an initial collaborative design process as well as opportunities to seek input and feedback from leaders throughout the program to inform adjustments and future sessions. Likewise, when principals transferred the instructional leadership practices to their schools, they also enacted collective leadership by engaging with teacher leaders and leveraging teacher strengths to support organizational change. By experiencing collective leadership within the principal professional learning program, they were able to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the purpose and value of collective leadership, leading to use within their schools as a change facilitator.

Coherence

Coherence was central to the experience of principals within the professional learning program and was also a necessary component leading to their support of organizational change within their schools. Within the principal professional learning program, the learning experiences were intentionally focused on the three learning priorities, and built on previous learning. Furthermore, when the principals discussed the barriers they experienced, these barriers indicated a lack of coherence among elementary and secondary expectations, further indicating the critical role of coherence in professional learning and change. As such, principals recognized the collective power in fostering coherent learning experiences in alignment with the

district priorities, leading them to translate their learning about the district priorities within the principal professional learning to school-based learning experiences to enhance learning for teachers and students.

Collaboration

The principal professional learning program revolved around collaborative learning experiences. Understanding the social nature of learning, principals had multiple opportunities to collaborate around meaningful and relevant topics during each session. As a result, principals stated that much of their individual change resulted from their collaboration with other leaders. Recognizing the value of these collaborative experiences, the principals also created collaborative experiences for teachers within their schools when translating their individual change into organizational change.

Differentiation

While the principal professional learning program provided some opportunities for differentiation, principals also expressed a desire for greater differentiation in their professional learning. Within the program, principals worked in self-selected PLC teams based on a common grade level focus determined by their school's needs. However, when discussing their barriers, principals noted that there were topics they were interested in learning more about that were not included in the program. Being attuned to the desire for differentiation, the principals adapted their support for teachers based on their readiness and need when facilitating professional learning within their schools.

Praxis

Overall, the principal professional learning program focused on relevant learning priorities with an expectation of implementation within schools, paired with opportunities to reflect on the implementation and engage in dialogue with others about the outcomes and next steps. This emphasis on praxis fostered individual change through action and reflection within the professional learning program. Accordingly, principals also created opportunities for praxis within their own schools, by focusing on these relevant learning priorities within their schools with an expectation of teacher implementation within their classrooms. As a result, principals were able to facilitate organizational change through opportunities for teachers to learn through action and reflection. Thus, the professional learning program proved to be educative in nature. By engaging in intentionally-designed professional learning, the principals learned to how to embed intentionally-designed professional learning experiences within their schools.

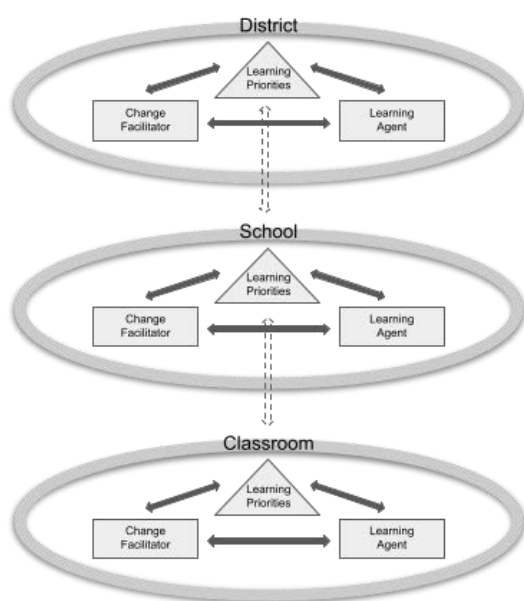
The Organizational Learning Core Framework

The interplay of these five critical connection points between professional learning and change revealed a structure that has illuminated the connection between theory and practice within the principal professional learning program. Through my dual role as researcher and change facilitator, along with my deep and systematic reflection on the findings, I have come to understand the principals' experience in the professional learning program through this structure, which I refer to as the Organizational Learning Core (see Figure 5.2). In the following section, I will describe the nature of the Organizational Learning Core, followed by an explanation of the following three themes that emerged regarding the Organizational Learning Core: (a) The Organizational Learning Core is central to personal and organizational change; (b) The

Organizational Learning Core provides a framework for authentic, multidimensional coherence; and (c) Differentiation within the Organizational Learning Core maintains coherence while supporting the unique needs of learning agents.

Figure 5.2

The Organizational Learning Core



Themes

Overall, principals found the consistent focus and collective nature of the learning priorities to be facilitators of change, and the collaborative experiences, consistent structure and frequent meetings supported their learning and change efforts within their schools. Each principal also appreciated the cohesive learning segments and the emphasis on praxis designed and led by the change facilitators. Furthermore, while acknowledging the benefits of differentiating professional learning experiences for learning agents, each principal also expressed the importance of learning from each other, as co-learning agents within the

professional learning program. Thus, (a) collective leadership, (b) coherence, (c) collaboration, (d) differentiation, and (e) praxis proved to be central to meaningful change through professional learning. When considering these findings, the existence of an *Organizational Learning Core* emerged as being central to personal and organizational change within this change context. The Organizational Learning Core is shown in Figure 5.2, and is a framework that can be used to understand the multi-dimensional change context within Sunshine School District. In the following sections, I will discuss the themes that emerged through this study using the structure of the Organizational Learning Core, and describe how the Organization Learning Core represents the design of coherent professional learning that occurred across multiple levels within Sunshine School District to foster meaningful change, both personally and throughout the organization.

Theme One: The Organizational Learning Core is central to personal and organizational change

The Organizational Learning Core expands upon the Instructional Core, a framework outlined by Cohen and Ball (1999) in their report, *Instruction, Capacity, and Improvement*. Cohen and Ball (1999) assert that increased instructional capacity is developed by attending to the “*interactions among teachers and students around educational material*, rather than seeing curriculum alone or teachers alone as the main source of instruction” (p. 2). They identify three elements of the Instructional Core—students, teachers, and material/technologies—and explain, “that any given element of instruction shapes instructional capacity by the way it interacts with and influences the other elements” (Cohen & Ball, 1999, p. 4). This framework can be used to understand the interactions among these elements within a classroom setting, however, classrooms are situated within a more comprehensive learning environment. Limiting the

discussion of increasing instructional capacity to the classroom ignores the broader context of learning and change and can decrease the potential impact of professional learning on personal and organizational change. Therefore, the Organizational Learning Core expands the concept of the Instructional Core to include multiple levels within an education system: the classroom, school, and district. Within the Organizational Learning Core, the three elements that interact to generate learning and change are the learning agents, change facilitators, and the learning priorities. Table 5.3 illustrates how the Organizational Learning Core expands the Instructional Core, and how each element of the Organizational Learning Core is represented at the district, school and classroom level within this study. By expanding this framework, professional learning for principals becomes a necessary component of organizational change.

Table 5.3

Elements of the Organizational Learning Core

Element	District	School	Classroom <i>Instructional Core</i>
Learning Agent	Principals	Teachers	Students
Change Facilitator	District Leaders	Principals	Teachers
Learning Priorities	Learning Priorities focused on the Instructional Core	Learning Priorities focused on the Instructional Core	Educational Material

In this study, the structure outlined in the Organizational Learning Core was central to personal and organizational change because it allowed principals to both experience *and* lead high quality professional learning by establishing *coherence* around the three instructionally focused learning priorities at the classroom, school and district level. This organizational coherence was significant in developing conditions conducive to change. In *The Internal*

Coherence Framework: Creating Conditions for Continuous Improvement in Schools, Forman, et. al. (2018) articulate the importance of establishing coherence around effective classroom practices informed by the Instructional Core in order to foster school improvement. Forman et. al. (2018) assert that, “leaders can play an important role in fostering such professional learning that is more comprehensively anchored *in instruction* [emphasis added]” (p. 18). However, Cohen and Ball (1999) noted, “Few schools share common instructional purposes, and even fewer employ instructional methods consistently” (p. 10). The principals in this study articulated the value of having common instructional priorities, supporting the assertion that the Organizational Learning Core provides a structure supporting a common and coherent focus on instructional practices within classrooms, across schools, and throughout the district. The findings in this study demonstrate that when learning takes place at all levels throughout the organization, personal and organizational change is more likely to take place.

Furthermore, similar to the Instructional Core, the Organizational Learning Core illustrates how learning is generated through the interaction of multiple elements—learning agent, change facilitator, and learning priorities— during learning experiences with an emphasis on praxis. For example, the learning experiences within the sessions of the principal professional learning program took place at the district level, where the principals, as learning agents, interacted with district leaders, as change facilitators, through learning experiences focused on the three learning priorities. After each session, there was an expectation that principals would translate the learning from these district level sessions into meaningful professional learning experiences at the school level focused on the same learning priorities using tools developed for school-based learning. Back in their schools, the principals would then take on the role of the

change facilitator, and teachers would become the learning agents focused on the same learning priorities. Building upon the explicit learning experiences focused on the learning priorities within the principal professional learning program at the district level, the expectation for principals to translate the learning to the school level provided tacit learning experiences around effective professional learning practices and led to personal change as principals became more skilled at leading meaningful professional learning within their schools.

According to the principals, this coherent and multi-layered system of professional learning represented by the Organizational Learning Core led to changes in teaching practices within classrooms in the areas of the learning priorities as a result of the teachers' experiences as learning agents at the school level. Thus, the Organizational Learning Core represents a structure that emerged through this study, allowing educators at multiple levels—district leaders, principals, and teachers—to put theory into practice and experience personal change through reflection on the nature of interactions among the learning agents, change facilitators, and the learning priorities at each level of the Organizational Learning Core. This interactive, multi-layered approach to change supported professional learning at multiple levels within the organization, resulting in personal and organizational change over the duration of the principal professional learning program.

Theme Two: The Organizational Learning Core provides a framework for authentic, multidimensional coherence

Another significant attribute of the principal professional learning program that contributed to change is the authentic multidimensional coherence that resulted from alignment within and across classrooms, schools and throughout the district. Personal change for educators

throughout the organization was facilitated through two types of coherence represented within the Organizational Learning Core: horizontal and vertical. Both horizontal and vertical coherence worked together to cultivate personal and organizational change. Horizontal coherence was evident in the common focus at each level of change within the Organizational Learning Core, and allowed for more meaningful collaboration within and among schools throughout the district. For example, horizontal coherence was noted when multiple *classrooms* within a school were focused on the same learning priorities, when multiple *schools* at the same level—elementary, junior high, or high school— focused on these learning priorities, or when multiple schools within the *district* focused on the same learning priorities (see Table 5.4). Principals found that a sense of solidarity was fostered through horizontal coherence, and resulted in learning agents having greater confidence in the learning priorities and increased the likelihood of seeing changes in practice. While horizontal coherence was recognized as one catalyst for change, vertical coherence also proved to be essential to change within the principal professional learning program.

Table 5.4

Horizontal Coherence within the Organizational Learning Core

Level	Description	Example from Principal Professional Learning Program
District	Multiple schools across levels focusing on the same learning priorities	Principals from all schools within the district—elementary, junior high, and high school—focused on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementing the district’s instructional vision through an asset orientation • Strengthening professional learning communities • Fostering high quality literacy instruction
School	Multiple schools within the same level focusing on	Principals participated in PLC teams with others at the same level—elementary, junior high, or high school— and were focused on the same learning priorities which

	the same learning priorities	provided opportunities to share ideas and discuss effective ways to support each priority in their own schools.
Classroom	All classrooms within each school are focused on the same instructional practices	Principals focused on the district learning priorities within their schools, having an expectation that all teachers participate in PLC teams and implement the instructional vision in their classrooms.

Vertical coherence is represented in the alignment of learning priorities across the classroom, school, and district levels. This vertical alignment was essential in establishing a culture conducive to change, and allowed for praxis as principals engaged in personal change as a learning agent during the professional learning program, and enacted the change as the change facilitator within their schools. To illustrate the concept of vertical coherence, I will provide an example using one of the learning priorities of the principal professional learning program: *strengthening professional learning communities*. This priority encompasses strengthening collaborative, standards-focused, and data-informed decision making among teacher teams with a focus on increasing student learning outcomes. Therefore, this learning priority meets the criteria of being “anchored in instruction” (Forman, et. al., 2018, p. 18) and provides a focus on the interactions among teachers, students, and content in alignment with the Instructional Core. Within the professional learning program, the principals participated in professional learning community teams during each session. Their experience in PLC teams allowed principals to experience the learning priority of strengthening professional learning communities in the role of learning agent. This ongoing experience in a PLC team provided an opportunity for principals to engage in personal change, as well as develop an understanding of the learning agent perspective. As learning agents in a principal PLC team, principals explored artifacts generated by their teachers in school-based PLC teams, and used what they noticed in the artifacts to

provide targeted support to teacher teams with the aim of developing more effective collaborative learning practices that result in increased student learning. This process of using artifacts to inform instructional leadership decisions within the principal PLC teams simulated the same process teachers experience when they work in learning teams to review student work to collaboratively identify ways to support higher levels of student achievement. As a result of engaging in a process at the district level that parallels what is expected at the school level, principals used their experience as a learning agent to inform more meaningful actions when transitioning into the role of change facilitator within their schools. Because they had established relevant background knowledge in their role as a learning agent at the district level, principals were able to lead change more effectively at the school level as the change facilitator. This example of vertical coherence is summarized in Table 5.5.

Table 5.5

Vertical Coherence within the Organizational Learning Core

Element	Description	Example from Principal Professional Learning Program
Learning Priority	Evidence-based area of focus that has the potential to improve student learning and can be supported by change facilitators and implemented by learning agents at the school and district level.	Strengthening Professional Learning Communities
Learning Agents	Individuals engaged in interactive learning experiences focused on the learning priorities with the expectation of implementation resulting in increased learning at the classroom, school, or district level	At the district level, principals review artifacts generated by teachers in PLC teams, and use what they notice to develop action steps to support school-based PLC teams with more effective practices resulting in increased student learning

Change Facilitators	Individuals who design & facilitate learning experiences to engage learning agents with the learning priorities	Within their schools, principals work with PLC teams and teacher leaders to develop collaborative practices, using what they learned during their principal PLC team to inform support
---------------------	---	--

The multidimensional nature of coherence fostered change within the principal professional learning program. However, it was the *authenticity* of the multidimensional coherence that made the change meaningful and relevant. Authenticity has different meanings in various contexts. The authentic multidimensional coherence of the Organizational Learning Core embodies authenticity that can be defined as the “consistency between an entity's internal values and external expressions” (Lehman, et. al., 2019, p. 1). The authentic coherence that emerged through this study was established through dialogue among change facilitators and learning agents across multiple levels within the organization. Through dialogue, the internal values of the learning agents and change facilitators were revealed and used to inform the selection of learning priorities that were not only shown to be effective in increasing student achievement, but were also in alignment with the internal values of those within the organization.

A noteworthy aspect of the principal professional learning program is that authentic coherence was intentionally built into the design from the outset. The theory of action that informed the design and implementation of the program includes the collaborative identification of the learning priorities. Furthermore, the theory of action also includes the expectation that change facilitators seek ongoing input and feedback from learning agents to inform adjustments to the professional learning program throughout its implementation. Rather than relying on an outside entity or a single senior leader from within the district to declare the learning priorities, the learning priorities were determined *collectively* by including input from learning agents and

change facilitators at multiple levels within the organization. Instead of coherence being initiated through top-down declarations, authentic coherence was cultivated as learning agents and change facilitators collaboratively identified and engaged with learning priorities that they determined were in alignment with their values. Similar to Freire's (1970) concept of authentic education, which is carried out "by 'A' *with* 'B'" (p. 93), authentic coherence is cultivated as change facilitators work collaboratively *with* learning agents across the classroom, school, and district levels.

The Organizational Learning Core demonstrates the authentic multidimensional coherence of the principal professional learning program by illustrating how the learning priorities, which were determined collectively by change facilitators and learning agents within the organization, became the focus of horizontal coherence within each level, and vertical coherence, spanning across classroom, school, and district level professional learning. The structure of the Organizational Learning Core provided consistency that proved to be a significant facilitator of personal and organizational change. However, the Organizational Learning Core is not intended to represent a one-size-fits-all approach to implementing change within an organization. Rather, it provides a structure that maintains coherence, while allowing for differentiation based on unique learning needs.

Theme Three: Differentiation within the Organizational Learning Core maintains coherence while supporting the unique needs of learning agents

Each learning agent comes to the organization with a unique set of experiences, skills and knowledge, thus experiencing professional learning uniquely. In this study, some principals found the professional learning program more transformational than others. Additionally,

principals identified unique barriers and facilitators to change within the program (Table 4.1). However, each of the facilitators and barriers to change that were noted all relate to the presence or lack of authentic multidimensional coherence. For example, *focus* and *collaboration* were facilitators of change identified by Principal Arthur. These facilitators are central to the authentic multidimensional coherence of the Organizational Learning Frame. By maintaining a *focus* on the learning priorities that were aligned across the classroom, school and district levels, and *collaborating* with other learning agents around these learning priorities at multiple levels, these facilitators contributed to change by creating authentic multidimensional coherence. In contrast, the *barriers* identified by Principal Arthur represent a *lack* of authentic multidimensional coherence. The barriers related to the structure and team dynamics among the high school principals within the professional learning program indicated a lack of authentic horizontal coherence. Recognizing a need for greater authenticity of coherence within the learning context of high school principals, it would be necessary to differentiate the learning experiences based on their unique needs to maximize change for the high school principals. While differentiation may seem to suggest the opposite of coherence at first glance, the Organizational Learning Core provides a consistent and coherent structure for professional learning across multiple levels of the organization within which change facilitators can engage and respond to learning agents through differentiated interactions that strengthen the authentic coherence of the organizational learning. Thus, differentiation within the Organizational Learning Core does not result in weaker coherence, but in fact is necessary for strengthening authentic coherence because it allows for experiences that are tailored to the unique interactions of the learning priorities, learning agents, and change facilitators. Differentiation within the

Organizational Learning Core fosters closer alignment between the unique internal values, individual learning needs, and the external actions supported through the learning priorities of the organization. Therefore, it is through the ongoing dialogue between the change facilitators and learning agents focused on the learning priorities within the Organizational Learning Core that meaningful differentiation is made possible to achieve authentic multidimensional coherence, leading to personal and organizational change.

Conclusion

While chapter 4 discussed the unique changes in knowledge, beliefs, and practices and the individualized barriers and facilitators to change of each principal, in this chapter I present the *common* findings that emerged across all cases related to the key players of change within a professional learning context (Table 5.1) and discuss the themes that emerged through the study. Overall, principals appreciated the consistent focus and collective nature of the Learning Priorities, along with the collaborative experiences, consistent structure, and session frequency of the Learning Environment. Principals benefited from the cohesive learning segments with an emphasis on praxis, and despite their unique learning needs, they learned from one another throughout the program. Five critical connection points between professional learning and change were identified through these common findings, and in light of these critical connection points, the Organizational Learning Core emerged as a framework to illustrate the complexity and coherence of the learning priorities within the change context of this study. The following three themes emerged regarding the Organizational Learning Core: (a) The Organizational Learning Core is central to personal and organizational change; (b) The Organizational Learning Core provides a framework for authentic, multidimensional coherence; and (c) Differentiation

within the Organizational Learning Core maintains coherence while supporting the unique needs of learning agents. Drawing from the unique findings of each case discussed in Chapter 4, and the integrated case results in Chapter 5 represented by the Organizational Learning Core, in the following chapter, I will discuss the implications and limitations of this study and make recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

Introduction

Educators are experiencing a time of complex change. In addition to the changing educational conditions that have been experienced globally as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic, Sunshine School District has experienced additional layers of change within their unique context, which includes a transition to new state literacy standards, and most significantly, a large-scale change in district leadership, which in turn led to many changes in school leadership. Within this complex change context, a yearlong professional learning program for school principals has served as a key lever for SSD in collectively navigating this change. Although professional learning and change literature are often generated in separated fields, they are closely connected, and the findings from this study make these connections clear.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand how principals experience change in a yearlong district designed and facilitated professional learning program by exploring their unique and common facilitators and barriers to change as well as to identify critical connection points between professional learning and change. In a recent Wallace Foundation report, *Developing Effective Principals: What Kind of Learning Matters?*, Darling-Hammond et. al (2022) articulates a need to “broaden the scope of research to include stronger descriptions of program content as well as pedagogical approaches” (p. 76), as well as research designed to “pay attention to how programs are implemented” (p. 79). This study was designed to do just that.

This qualitative multi-case study involved four principals who actively engaged in a district designed and facilitated yearlong professional learning program. I used an intentionally

designed sequence of data collection, including document analysis and semi-structured interviews, to explore the following research questions:

1. How do principals experience a yearlong professional learning program focused on implementing the district's instructional vision through an asset orientation, strengthening professional learning communities, and fostering high quality literacy instruction?
 - a. What changes in knowledge do principals identify in each area?
 - b. What changes in beliefs do principals identify in each area?
 - c. What changes in practices do principals identify in each area?
 - d. What barriers and facilitators to change do principals identify in each area?
2. What are the critical connection points between professional learning and change within the program?

The findings highlight several commonalities among the change experiences of all four principals, but also illuminate the fact that each principal experienced change within the program uniquely. Additionally, five critical connection points between professional learning and change were identified. Through an analysis of these five critical connection points developed from the consistent and varying findings, a framework emerged that can be used to illustrate and understand the common, yet differing, experiences of principals as they engaged in personal change within the professional learning program and led organizational change within their schools. This framework, which I refer to as the Organizational Learning Core (Figure 5.2), represents the complexity of interactions inherent in learning organizations within the alignment of learning priorities throughout the district, and provides a structure that will allow educators at multiple levels—district leaders, principals, and teachers—to put theory into practice and experience personal change through reflection on the nature of interactions among the learning

agents, change facilitators, and the learning priorities at each level. Furthermore, the Organizational Learning Core can also be used to understand potential barriers and facilitators to professional learning and change. In the following section, I will discuss the potential of the Organizational Learning Core to inform change leadership through aligned professional learning experiences.

Discussion

Navigating change within an organization, whether externally imposed or internally driven, is complex. Leaders in a context of change have myriad factors to consider and attend to. The five critical connection points between professional learning and change that emerged from the findings — collective leadership, coherence, collaboration, differentiation, and praxis— outline essential factors that have proven relevant and necessary for facilitating meaningful change through a professional learning program situated in a broader context of change. The Organizational Learning Core provides a structured framework for navigating this change from multiple perspectives and with various scopes. When considering a single professional learning program, this framework can be used to understand the broader context of change within which the program is situated to more accurately anticipate potential barriers and facilitators and inform the design and facilitation of the program. Furthermore, when the scope is expanded to facilitate widespread change throughout an entire school district, the Organizational Learning Core can be used to inform decisions and actions taken by change facilitators seeking to align multiple professional learning programs into a system of authentic multidimensional coherence to maximize organizational change. Ultimately, by framing a change context as a multidimensional system of interactions among aligned elements within the Organizational Learning Core taking

place within multiple professional learning experiences, the change context can be better understood and navigated more effectively with the aim of becoming more conducive to meaningful change for individuals and the organization as a whole. Through this discussion, I will explore how the Organizational Learning Core provides a structure to better understand the dynamic environment generated through interactions within a context of change so that change facilitators can cultivate the authentic multidimensional coherence necessary for meaningful professional learning experiences.

Structure

The Organizational Learning Core framework provides a sense of structure in a highly dynamic environment. Complex change environments can seem unstable and insecure due to the volume of information that is encountered in each aspect of the change context (i.e., learning agents, change facilitators, learning priorities, available resources, etc.) and generated through the interactions among them. With so much to consider, developing a clear path forward can be challenging. When discussing the complexity of the instructional core at the classroom level, Cohen and Ball (1999) explain the adverse effects of the volume of information generated from multiple factors within educational organizations, stating, “Guidance is often inconsistent and unclear, in part because the volume of diverse advice overloads cognitive capabilities and encourages superficial acquaintance and misconceptions” (p. 11). Within an organization, there are multiple levels of learning, magnifying the potential for diverse advice and cognitive overload for leaders within the system. In response, the Organizational Learning Core can be used as a structure for framing and understanding the complexity of change in an educational organization, and to generate greater clarity for leveraging professional learning more effectively

when cultivating organizational change. Additionally, by providing an overall structure to the multiplex nature of a change context in which professional learning programs are situated, the outcomes of the interactions among the elements within a professional learning program can be attended to more intentionally.

Interactions

Similar to the nature of the instructional core at the classroom level, the Organizational Learning Core represents the nuances and complexity of the interactions among the elements of learning at the school level and at the district level within a multi-layered learning context. This is seen in SSD, as a school district facilitating an ongoing professional learning program for principals, who are then expected to facilitate professional learning experiences for teachers throughout the organization. When describing the instructional core, Cohen and Ball (1999) explain, “[Every] student and curriculum is a bundle of possibilities, and teachers whose perceptions have been more finely honed to see those possibilities, and who know more about how to take advantage of them, will be more effective” (p. 8). In the same vein, leaders who can see the possibilities for professional learning among the interactions among the various actors at multiple levels throughout an organization are likely to be more effective. The Organizational Learning Core provides a structure for illuminating the multiple possibilities for professional learning within the interactions that occur throughout a learning organization, in the way that it did in this study of SSD. Furthermore, the Organizational Learning Core draws from, and integrates, two bodies of literature, organizational change and professional learning.

Fullan (2008) outlines *Six Secrets of Change*: (a) love your employees, (b) connect peers with purpose, (c) capacity building prevails, (d) learning is the work, (e) transparency rules, and

(f) systems learn. These secrets are represented within the Organizational Learning Core Framework. For example, Fullan (2008) describes the meaning of *love your employees* as, “helping employees find meaning, increased skill development, and making contributions that *simultaneously* fulfill their own goals and the goals of the organization” (p. 25). Through the authentic multidimensional coherence of the Organizational Learning Core, individuals have the opportunity to engage in learning experiences as a learning agent for personal change in alignment with the learning priorities, while also having opportunities as a change facilitator to support organizational change. Additionally, the authentic multidimensional coherence of the Organizational Learning Core *connects peers with purpose* as the learning priorities are collectively identified to align with the values of the learning agents and change facilitators. Through the interactions represented at each level, leaders “engage peers in purposeful interactions where quality experiences and results are central to the work” (Fullan, 2008, p. 46). Additionally, *capacity building prevails* when learning is taking place at all levels. Within the Organizational Learning Core Framework, “[learning agents and change facilitators] continually develop individually and collectively on the job” (Fullan, 2008, p. 63).” *Learning is the work* within the structure of the Organizational Learning Core, and individuals take on multiple roles at different levels of the organization: at times as the learning agent engaging in personal change and other times as the change facilitator coordinating valuable learning experiences for others. Furthermore, the alignment of learning priorities across multiple levels creates conditions for *transparency*, and at its most basic level, the Organizational Learning Core serves as a framework to represent and understand how *systems learn*. Fullan (2008) explains that systems learn by “grappling with system complexities, taking action, and then learning from the

experiences—all while engaging their leaders, to increase changes that the organization as a whole will learn now and keep on learning” (p. 119). The Organizational Learning Core offers a framework to guide leaders in grappling with complexities within a system with the aim of establishing authentic multidimensional coherence to create conditions conducive to learning and change.

Furthermore, the effective professional learning features outlined by Darling-Hammond, et. al. (2017) and Desimone (2009) are also evident in the Organizational Learning Core (Table 2.8). The aligned learning priorities throughout the organization embody a multi-level *content focus*, while *active learning, collaboration, models of effective practice, coaching and expert support, and feedback and reflection* are represented in the interactions among the learning agents and change facilitators at each level. The multidimensional nature of the Organizational Learning Core implies a *sustained duration*, where learning experiences are ongoing and translated from one level to another, and most significantly, authentic multidimensional *coherence* is at the heart of the Organizational Learning Core. Attending to these professional learning features within *one* professional learning program can lead to meaningful personal change. Furthermore, by understanding how each of these effective professional learning features is represented within *multiple* professional learning experiences with aligned learning priorities throughout the Organizational Learning Core, leaders can expand the scope of learning and foster meaningful organizational change. Seeing the connections between professional learning and change provides valuable insight into a context of change, and this study serves as

an example of how reflecting on the interactions of each element with the Organizational Learning Core can lead to personal change that generates organizational change.

Coherence

A notable aspect of the Organizational Learning Core is that it provides a framework for authentic multidimensional coherence. The collective identification of learning priorities drawn from perspectives throughout the organization results in learning priorities that are aligned to the values of those within all levels of the organization and are likely to be more meaningful than initiatives determined outside the organization. And after these learning priorities are identified, school and district leaders have the choice to enlist change facilitators from within the organization to design and facilitate aligned professional learning experiences, or to seek skilled facilitators from outside the organization. In this study, internal change facilitators familiar with the context designed and facilitated professional learning experiences at the district and school levels, resulting in meaningful change. Having change facilitators who were attuned to the values, histories, and needs of the learning agents allowed them to more easily create conditions for authentic multidimensional coherence. While it may be more challenging for outside change facilitators to foster authentic multidimensional coherence being less familiar with the context, the Organizational Learning Core can be useful in helping those with little prior knowledge of a specific change context navigate the process of aligning the learning priorities of a professional learning program to the values of the organization in order to create opportunities for horizontal and vertical coherence resulting in more meaningful learning and change.

Furthermore, this authentic multidimensional coherence has the potential to reduce or eliminate many of the common barriers to change: cultural barriers, social barriers,

organizational barriers, and psychological barriers (Ellsworth, 2000). Cultural barriers occur when there is a conflict between one's values and the innovation that is being supported. When learning priorities are collectively identified, there is a greater likelihood that learning priorities will align with the values of those within the organization, reducing the tendency of cultural barriers to change. Similarly, when psychological factors of the group inhibit implementation, social barriers exist. When the group is responsible for collectively identifying the learning priorities, this social barrier is transformed into a facilitator of change, as individuals socially construct these learning priorities together, making them more appealing to the group, and less likely to be opposed by individuals. Additionally, organizational barriers can be reduced through authentic multidimensional coherence. When the characteristics of the organization are in alignment with the learning priorities across all levels, there is less opposition to change. Furthermore, psychological barriers are also reduced through the authentic multidimensional coherence within the Organizational Learning Core because the traits and reactions of the individuals within the organization are taken into account when the learning priorities are collectively identified and aligned throughout the organization. Although it is impossible for *every* individual within an organization to be in full agreement with the learning priorities and to experience the interactions between the change facilitator and learning agent positively, cultivating authentic multidimensional coherence within the Organizational Learning Core has the potential to minimize barriers to professional learning and foster change through meaningful learning experiences.

Implications

Understanding the connection between professional learning and change, made evident through the authentic multidimensional coherence within the Organizational Learning Core, can enhance the quality of instructional leadership *and* change leadership—two common responsibilities for educational leaders— and integrate them synergistically so that professional learning and change efforts can be aligned to maximize impact. When educational leaders recognize the importance of aligning instructionally-focused learning priorities to the values of those across all levels of the organization and providing collaborative, well-designed, and differentiated learning experiences aligned to those values, they can more effectively cultivate personal and organizational change. The Organizational Learning Core that emerged through this study has potential implications for change leaders, professional learning programs, and leadership preparation programs.

District Leaders are responsible for leading change on a broad scale. It can be overwhelming to consider the infinite possibilities that exist within an organization when seeking to generate a wide scope of change. And while focused change efforts may seem more manageable, the narrow focus can prove to be futile in an incoherent change context. Therefore, the Organizational Learning Core has the potential to be a useful structure for district leaders, guiding them to work collectively with school leaders and teachers to identify meaningful instructionally-focused learning priorities and align professional learning programs focused on these learning priorities throughout the district, school, and classroom levels in pursuit of meaningful change and increased student learning. Rather than forcing outside mandates for learning that may be perceived as irrelevant to school leaders and teachers, district learning priorities focused on effective instructional practices can be collectively identified and these

learning priorities can serve as the focus of differentiated professional learning programs throughout the district. Furthermore, when the professional learning programs at the district and school levels offer ongoing collaborative learning experiences focused on praxis, they are more likely to cultivate a deeper understanding of the learning priorities leading to personal and organizational change in schools, in classrooms, and ultimately result in greater student success.

Professional Learning Programs are designed for a narrow audience with a specific focus, however, they are experienced within a broader organizational context. While single professional learning programs designed in alignment with the features of effective professional learning (Darling-Hammond et. al., 2017; Desimone, 2009) have a much greater chance of resulting in meaningful change, barriers may still emerge if the professional learning program is misaligned to the district's learning priorities or if the variations in the interactions among change facilitators, the learning agents, and the learning priorities within the program are not conducive to change (e.g., the learning priorities are not relevant to the learning agents, or the change facilitator is not attuned to the needs of the learning agents). In other words, if the professional learning program conflicts with the broader organizational context, change is much less likely to occur. To anticipate and reduce potential barriers within professional learning programs, the designers and facilitators of these programs can use the Organizational Core as a structure through which to design and reflect on learning experiences in order to more effectively meet the differentiated needs of the learning agents in alignment with the collectively determined learning priorities. If professional learning programs are intentionally designed and facilitated with the Organizational Learning Core in mind, aspects of the program can be intentionally constructed to cultivate meaningful change through the interactions among the learning

priorities, change facilitators and learning agents. For example, change facilitators can use examples that are relevant to the learning agents and build on prior learning when discussing the learning priorities, and learning agents can work in collaborative groups that are intentionally selected to include multiple strengths and perspectives. Understanding that professional learning programs are part of a broader context leads to more meaningful learning experiences resulting in personal and organizational change.

Leadership Preparation Programs are designed to equip potential educational leaders with the skills and knowledge necessary to lead effectively, and two significant components of education are learning and change. Within this study, the interconnectedness of professional learning and change is clear. Therefore, it stands to reason that when instructional leaders understand how aligned professional learning programs focused on collectively identified learning priorities can create authentic multidimensional coherence within a complex change environment, they are more likely to enact leadership moves that fosters personal and organizational change. Therefore, rather than segmenting professional learning and change into separate courses, or presenting them as disparate concepts, presenting the synergistic relationship between professional learning and change using the structure of the Organizational Learning Core can lead to an integrated and more comprehensive and synergistic approach to leading change within a learning organization.

Limitations

Within this multi-case study exploring the experience of four principals within a yearlong principal professional learning program, I must note several limitations. First, this investigation is a qualitative case study of a single medium sized district in the state of Florida that took place

over the course of one year in a period of time situated during a pandemic, a time of changing state standards, and a time of significant changes in district leadership. The findings in this study are limited to this unique context and cannot be generalized to contexts that do not reflect these characteristics. Furthermore, this study only explored the experiences of four of the forty-two principals who participated in the yearlong professional learning program. It does not encompass the experiences of all engaged leaders, nor does it encompass the perspectives of leaders who were not engaged. Additionally, the findings of this study did not take into account the gender or race of the principals engaged in the yearlong principal professional learning program. Therefore discussing or interpreting these findings in light of these characteristics is not possible. One final limitation to consider is that I was a designer and facilitator of the professional learning program. The dual role of practitioner and researcher has the potential to influence the stories told by the participants, as well as the analysis of the findings.

Future Research

The emergence of the Organizational Learning Core (OLC), the authentic multidimensional coherence central to the OLC, and the need for differentiation within the OLC offers several opportunities for future research. First, additional research is needed to determine how less engaged principals experienced the yearlong professional learning program to see if the Organizational Learning Core could be used to also explain their experience, possibly through incoherent interactions among elements with each level and across multiple levels of the OLC. Additionally, the OLC emerged from this study of principals' experiences in a professional learning program and their accounts of personal change and the organizational changes they led within their schools, however, teachers and students are also represented in the OLC. Therefore

additional research that explores the experiences of principals, teachers, and students through the OLC framework could provide valuable insight into the relationship between learning and change throughout an organization.

Additionally, more research is needed to explore how, or whether, the Organizational Learning Core is representative of other contexts. It would be valuable to understand if the OLC is representative of the experiences of principals in other medium sized districts, and to know if it is also relevant to the context of small districts, and/or large districts. More research is necessary to know if the OLC explains the relationship between professional learning and change in other contexts of change with unique features not represented in this study. Additional research is also needed to explore the OLC in the context of other districts in Florida, in districts located in other states in the U.S., or in districts in countries across the world.

Furthermore, because change is an ongoing process that takes time, longitudinal studies over a multi-year period could provide additional insight into the relationship between professional learning and change and how they can be represented and leveraged within the Organizational Learning Core. Similarly, studying more than one professional learning program at differing levels within the OLC could also provide greater insight into the relationship between professional learning and change.

Ultimately, the desired outcome of professional learning and change in education is increased student learning. Therefore, future research is also needed to see the impact that the authentic multidimensional coherence and differentiated professional learning experiences within the OLC have on student achievement. Understanding the degree to which the OLC can foster student achievement can provide valuable insight for educators when leveraging professional

learning experiences in a context of change with the aim of cultivating meaningful learning experiences at the classroom, school, and district levels.

Researcher Reflection

While I sought to understand the experiences of principals in a yearlong professional learning program through this study, I would be remiss if I did not take a moment to consider my own learning experience as a co-designer, co-facilitator and researcher of this program. As I reflect on my experience in comparison with the principals' experiences, I believe that my experience of designing, facilitating, and researching the professional learning program was likely much more transformational for me than the program was for the principals. Compared to the experiences of the principals as participants in the program, my learning experiences as a designer, facilitator, and researcher were more job-embedded, involved investing a greater amount of time with the content in the program, and provided significantly more opportunities for specific feedback and reflection directly related to my work, which, not surprisingly, are represented in the features of effective professional learning (Darling-Hammond et. al., 2017; Desimone, 2009). When co-designing and co-facilitating with the district leadership team, I was able to draw from research to inform the design and facilitation, and the experience of writing the literature review for this study made these connections between theory and practice explicit, strengthening my understanding of the research. During the study, I engaged in intentional, focused, and deep reflection through document and interview analysis coupled with analytic memoing to clarify my thinking along the way, thus allowing for more structured reflection and visible learning. The level of engagement and praxis required to design, facilitate, and research

the professional learning program allowed me to experience transformative professional learning.

As a result of the meaningful learning I experienced through this study, my self-efficacy as a designer and facilitator of professional learning has increased. The reciprocal nature of professional learning design and structured reflection through writing clearly illuminated the nature of the interactions between the change facilitator, learning agent, and learning priorities within this professional learning context, allowing me to make better informed decisions in my pursuit of cultivating meaningful learning experiences for others. Additionally, in the role of Supervisor of Professional Learning, there are fewer options for my own growth as a designer and facilitator of professional learning experiences. Therefore, I will continue to use the habits of reflective practice that I have developed as a researcher throughout my professional learning journey to create my own opportunities for growth through praxis. Furthermore, I will look for opportunities to embed praxis and inquiry into future learning experiences for others so that they have similar opportunities to study their own practice more formally and strengthen their own self-efficacy through their own journey of professional growth.

Finally, in the short time since identifying the Organizational Learning Core framework, I have already found it to be transformational for my practice as an instructional leader and district-level change facilitator. I have shared the Organizational Learning Core with SSD district and school leaders, and it has provided a framework for understanding the alignment of instructional change efforts throughout our district. As such, it has created a common language for discussing instructional strengths, needs, and next steps, and it has helped school leaders see the value of praxis in their own learning and the learning of the teachers in their schools. With

the large number of new leaders in SSD, this common understanding of the role of professional learning in the change process has the potential to provide a solid foundation for impactful instructional leadership as they continue to learn and grow as a school leader. Furthermore, in my work, the Organizational Learning Core has become a resource to inform instructional and professional learning leadership decisions. The OLC illuminates the interconnected nature of the organization, and when making leadership decisions, I have begun using this framework to identify potential points of impact and conflict so that I can proactively attend to these issues to create conditions to maximize change and learning. Overall, I have found that in my effort to understand how principals experience professional learning, I have experienced transformational professional learning that will allow me to continue to cultivate authentic multidimensional coherence within professional learning systems and differentiate within those systems to facilitate meaningful organizational change.

Conclusion

Through this study, I sought to understand how principals experience change within a yearlong professional learning program that was designed and facilitated in alignment with evidence-based professional learning practices. I explored their unique and common barriers and facilitators to change in order to gain insight into the role of principal professional learning within a district wide approach to leading change in a context of significant educational change. Ultimately, this study explored the relationship between professional learning and change.

The results of this study revealed five critical connection points between professional learning and change that outline essential factors that have proven relevant and necessary for facilitating meaningful change through a professional learning program situated in a broader

context of change: (a) collective leadership, (b) coherence, (c) collaboration, (d) differentiation, and (e) praxis. Through the interaction of these five connection points, the Organizational Learning Core emerged as a framework that can be used by educators at multiple levels—district leaders, principals, and teachers—to put theory into practice as they reflect on and make more informed decisions by considering the nature of interactions among the learning priorities, change facilitators and the learning agents.

Three themes emerged to explain how the Organizational Learning Core can be used to understand, navigate and leverage the relationship between professional learning and change within this change context. The first theme is that the Organizational Learning Core is central to personal and organizational change. The second theme expands on the first, showing that the Organizational Learning Core provides a framework for authentic multidimensional coherence. The third theme acknowledges that each learning agent has unique learning needs, and differentiation within the Organizational Learning Core maintains coherence while supporting these unique learning needs. Overall, these themes demonstrate that professional learning can effectively leverage personal change in pursuit of organizational change. When professional learning experiences are aligned to collectively established learning priorities, span multiple levels within an organization with an expectation of praxis, and are differentiated based on the needs of the learning agent, while still remaining focused on the learning priorities, meaningful change can occur.

Ultimately, through this study, I suggest that change and professional learning are complementary. This study adds to the literature in both fields, and serves to connect them, by illuminating evidence that when learning priorities are identified collectively from within an

organization, and coordinated learning experiences are facilitated across multiple levels within a district, meaningful change is possible.

REFERENCES

- Aguilar, E., Goldwasser, D., & Tank-Crestetto, K. (2011). Support principals, transform schools. *Educational Leadership*, 69(2), 70–73.
- American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, Pub. L. No, 111-5 & 111- 8, Stat. 115 & 524 (2009).
- Argyris, C., & Schon, D. (1978). *Organizational learning: A theory of action perspective*. Addison-Wesley.
- Avidov-Ungar, O., & Ezran, E. (2020). The Hashkafa program as a framework for the professional development of teachers: The perceptions of principals. *Leadership & Policy in Schools*, 19(2), 190–208. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2018.1513157>
- Boccagni, P., & Schrooten, M. (2018). Participant observation in migration studies: An overview and some emerging issues. In Zapata-Barrero, R., & Yalaz, E. (Eds.), *Qualitative research in European migration studies* (pp. 209-225). Springer Nature. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-76861-8>
- CASEL. (n.d.). *Fundamentals of SEL*. <https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel>
- Calabrese, R. L., Hummel, C., & San Martin, T. (2007). Learning to appreciate at-risk students: Challenging the beliefs and attitudes of teachers and administrators. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 21(4), 275-291. Retrieved from <https://login.dax.lib.unf.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ800397&site=ehost-live&scope=sitelhttp://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09513540710749500>
- Cameron, J., Mercier, K., & Doolittle, S. (2016). Teacher-led change in secondary school physical education. *Physical Educator*, 73(1), 32.

- Chang, D. F., Chen, S. N., & Chou, W. C. (2017). Investigating the Major Effect of Principal's Change Leadership on School Teachers' Professional Development. *IAFOR Journal of Education*, 5(3), 139-154.
- Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. (1999). Relationships of knowledge and practice: Teacher learning in communities. *Review of research in education*, 24, 249-305.
- Cohen, D. K., & Ball, D. L. (1999). *Instruction, capacity, and improvement*. CPRE Publications, University of Pennsylvania, Graduate School of Education.
- Cutrer-Párraga, E. A., Heath, M. A., & Caldarella, P. (2021). Navigating Early Childhood Teachers Initial Resistance to Literacy Coaching in Diverse Rural Schools. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 49(1), 37–47. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-020-01037-5>
- Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E., & Gardner, M. (2017). *Effective teacher professional development*. Learning Policy Institute.
- Darling-Hammond, L., LaPointe, M., Meyerson, D., Orr, M. T., Cohen, C., Finance Project, WestEd, & Stanford Educational Leadership Institute (SELI). (2007). *Preparing school leaders for a changing world: Lessons from exemplary leadership development programs*. School Leadership Study. Final Report. Stanford Educational Leadership Institute.
- Darling-Hammond, L., Wechsler, M. E., Levin, S., Leung-Gagné, M., & Tozer, S. (2022). Developing effective principals: What kind of learning matters? [Report]. Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/641.201>
- Desimone, L. M. (2009). Improving impact studies of teachers' professional development: Toward better conceptualizations and measures. *Educational researcher*, 38(3), 181-199.

- DuFour, R., & DuFour, R. (2013). *Learning by doing: A handbook for professional learning communities at work TM*. Solution Tree Press.
- Durand, F. T., Lawson, H. A., Wilcox, K. C., & Schiller, K. S. (2016). The Role of District Office Leaders in the Adoption and Implementation of the Common Core State Standards in Elementary Schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 52(1), 45–74.
- Ellsworth, J. (2000). *Surviving change: A survey of educational change models*. Syracuse, NY: ERIC Clearinghouse on Information and Technology.
- Fisher, D, Frey, N. & Hite, S.A. (2016). *Intentional and targeted teaching: A framework for teacher growth and leadership*. ASCD.
- Florida’s B.E.S.T. Standards, “Florida’s B.E.S.T. Standards: English Language Arts” (Florida Department of Education, 2020), <http://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/18736/urlt/ELASStandards.PDF>.
- Forman, M. L., Stosich, E. L., & Bocala, C. (2018). *The internal coherence framework: Creating the conditions for continuous improvement in schools*. Harvard Education Press.
- Freire, P. (2018). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Fullan, M. (2001). *Leading in a Culture of Change*. Josey-Bass.
- Fullan, M. (2008). *The six secrets of change: What the best leaders do to help their organizations survive and thrive*. Josey-Bass.

- Fullan, M. (2011). *Change Leader*. Josey-Bass.
- Fullan, M. (2014). *The principal: Three keys to maximizing impact*. Josey-Bass.
- Fullan, M. (2007). *The new meaning of educational change* (4th ed.). Teachers College Press.
- Fullan, M. (2016). *The new meaning of educational change* (5th ed.). Routledge.
- Gay, G. (2002). Preparing for culturally responsive teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(2), 106–116.
- Gerger, K. (2014). 1:1 tablet technology implementation in the Manhattan Beach Unified School District: A case study. [Doctoral dissertation, Grand Canyon University]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Gregory, A., Clawson, K., Davis, A., & Gerewitz, J. (2016). The Promise of Restorative Practices to Transform Teacher-Student Relationships and Achieve Equity in School Discipline. *Journal of Educational & Psychological Consultation*, 26(4), 325–353.
- Grissom, J. A., Egalite, A. J., & Lindsay, C. A. (2021). *How principals affect students and schools: A systematic synthesis of two decades of research*. Wallace Foundation.
- Guskey, T. R. (2000). *Evaluating professional learning*. Corwin Press.
- Hardy, I., & Rönnerman, K. (2019). A “Deleterious” Driver: The “First Teacher” Reform in Sweden. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 63(5), 805–818.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2018.1452289>
- Hargreaves, A., & Fullan, M. (2015). *Professional capital: Transforming teaching in every school*. Teachers College Press.
- Henderson, G.M. (2002). Transformative Learning as a Condition for Transformational Change

- in Organizations. *Human Resource Development Review*, 1(2), 186–214.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/15384302001002004>
- Herrmann, M., Clark, M., James-Burdumy, S., Tuttle, C., Kautz, T., Knechtel, V., Dotter, D., Wulsin, C. S., Deke, J., & National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (ED). (2019). The effects of a principal professional development program focused on instructional leadership. NCEE 2020-0002. *National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance*.
- Horner, R. H., Sugai, G., & Anderson, C. M. (2010). Examining the evidence base for school-wide positive behavior support. *Focus on exceptional children*, 42(8).
- Ikemoto, G., Taliaferro, L., Fenton, B., Davis, J., New Leaders, & George W. Bush Institute, A. to R. E. L. (AREL). (2014). *Great principals at scale: Creating district conditions that enable all principals to be effective*. New Leaders.
- James-Ward, C. (2013). *Using data to focus instructional improvement*. ASCD.
- Jensen, R., & Møller, J. (2013). School data as mediators in professional development. *Journal of Educational Change*, 14(1), 95–112. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-012-9197-y>
- Kang, H., Lyu, L., & Sun, Q. (2016). Examining the impact of a DSP project through a comparative adult education lens: A snapshot of principal professional development for education internationalization in Beijing, China. *Educational Considerations*, 43(3), 18–26. <https://doi.org/10.4148/0146-9282.1017>
- Kern, B. D., & Graber, K. C. (2017). Physical education teacher change: Initial validation of the

- teacher change questionnaire-physical education. *Measurement in Physical Education and Exercise Science*, 21(3), 161-173.
- Learning Forward. (2022a). *Data*. <https://learningforward.org/standards/data/>
- Learning Forward. (2022b). *Implementation*.
<https://learningforward.org/standards/implementation/>
- Learning Forward. (2022c). *Leadership*. <https://learningforward.org/standards/leadership/>
- Learning Forward. (2022d). *Learning Communities*.
<https://learningforward.org/standards/learning-communities/>
- Learning Forward. (2022e). *Learning Designs*.
<https://learningforward.org/standards/learning-designs/>
- Learning Forward. (2022f). *Outcomes*. <https://learningforward.org/standards/learning-outcomes/>
- Learning Forward. (2022g). *Resources*. <https://learningforward.org/standards/resources/>
- Learning Forward. (2022h). *Standards*.
<https://learningforward.org/standards-for-professional-learning/>
- Learning Forward. (n.d.). Quick reference guide: Standards for professional learning. Learning Forward. <https://learningforward.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/standards-reference-guide.pdf>
- Lehman, D. W., O'Connor, K., Kovács, B., & Newman, G. E. (2019). Authenticity. *The Academy of Management Annals*, 13(1), 1–42. <https://doi.org/10.5465/annals.2017.0047>
- Leithwood, K., Jantzi, D., & Steinbach, R. (1999). *Changing leadership for changing times*. McGraw-Hill Education (UK).
- Mackey, J., O'Reilly, N., Jansen, C., & Fletcher, J. (2018). Leading change to co-

- teaching in primary schools: A “down under” experience. *Educational Review*, 70(4), 465–485. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2017.1345859>
- Mayes, E., & Gethers, K. (2018). Transformational Leadership: Creating a Learning Culture in an Age of Accountability. *AASA Journal of Scholarship & Practice*, 15(3), 12–31.
- McDonald, L. (2009). Teacher change: A dynamic interactive approach. *International Journal of Learning*, 16(10), 623–636. <https://doi.org/10.18848/1447-9494/CGP/v16i10/46682>
- McKenzie, K. B., & Skrla, L. (2011). *Using equity audits in the classroom to reach and teach all students*. Corwin Press.
- Mezirow, J. (2000). *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress*. Jossey-Bass.
- Moore, S., & Kochan, F. (2013). Principals’ perceptions of professional development in high- and low-performing high-poverty schools. *International Journal of Educational Reform*, 22(2), 167–181. <https://doi.org/10.1177/105678791302200204>
- Naidoo, P. (2019). Perceptions of teachers and school management teams of the leadership roles of public school principals. *South African Journal of Education*, 39(2), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v39n2a1534>
- Nasreen, A., & Odhiambo, G. (2018). The continuous professional development of school principals: Current practices in Pakistan. *Bulletin of Education & Research*, 40(1), 245–266.
- National Commission on Excellence in Education. (1983). *A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform*. *The Elementary School Journal*, 84(2), 113-130.
- Newman, M. (2013). Conceptualizations of school leadership among high school principals in

- Jamaica. *Journal of International Education & Leadership*, 3(3), 1–16.
- No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, P.L. 107-110, 20 U.S.C. § 6319 (2002).
- Nunnery, J. A., Ross, S. M., Chappell, S., Pribesh, S., & Hoag-Carhart, E. (2011). *The impact of the NISL executive development program on school performance in Massachusetts: Cohort 2 results*. The Center for Educational Partnerships, Old Dominion University.
- Oliva, J. (2020, February 13). *Adoption and Implementation of the Benchmarks for Excellent Student Thinking (B.E.S.T.) Standards* [Memorandum]. Florida Department of Education. <https://info.fl DOE.org/docu share/dsweb/Get/Document-8838/dps-2020-26.pdf>
- Parson, L., Hunter, C. A., & Kallio, B. (2016). Exploring educational leadership in rural schools. *Planning & Changing*, 47(1/2), 63–81.
- Patojoki, K., Soini-Ikonen, T., Pietarinen, J., & Pyhältö, K. (2021). Principals as leading learners in Finnish curriculum reform. *International Studies in Educational Administration (Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration & Management (CCEAM))*, 49(2), 28–49.
- Pringle, E. (2021). Urban high school administrators second order change. *Planning & Changing*, 50(1/2), 3–19.
- Prothero, A. (2015). For principals, continuous learning critical to career success. *Education Week*, 34(18), 10-11.
- Ravitch, S. M., & Carl, N. M. (2021). *Qualitative research: Bridging the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Rogers, E.M. (1995). *Diffusion of Innovations*. (4th Ed.) Free Press.

- Rogers, R. (2018). Coding and Writing Analytic Memos on Qualitative Data: A Review of Johnny Saldaña's *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. *The Qualitative Report*, 23(4), 889-892. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2018.3459>
- Rowland, C. (2017). Principal professional development: New opportunities for a renewed state focus. *Education Policy Center at American Institutes for Research*.
- Rubin, H. J. & Rubin, I. S. (2012). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data* (Third ed.). Sage.
- Saldana, J. (2021) *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Sage.
- Scott, J. T., & Armstrong, A. C. (2019). Disrupting the deficit discourse: Reframing metaphors for professional *learning* in the context of appreciative inquiry. *Professional Development in Education*, 45(1), 114-124. doi:10.1080/19415257.2018.1452780
- Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*. Teachers college press.
- Spear-Swerling, L. (2019). Structured literacy and typical literacy practices: Understanding differences to create instructional opportunities. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 51(3), 201-211.
- TNTP. (2017). *Core teaching rubric: A tool for conducting common core-aligned classroom observations*. TNTP. <https://tntp.org/publications/view/tntp-core-teaching-rubric-a-tool-for-conducting-classroom-observations>
- TNTP. (2018). The opportunity myth: What students can show us about how school is letting them down and how to fix it. https://tntp.org/assets/documents/TNTP_The-Opportunity-Myth_Web.pdf

- Umekubo, L., Chrispeels, J., & Daly, A. (2015). The cohort model: Lessons learned when principals collaborate. *Journal of Educational Change*, 16(4), 451–482.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-015-9256-2>
- Valencia, R. R. (Ed.). (1997). *The evolution of deficit thinking: Educational thought and practice*. Falmer Press.
- Valencia, R. R. (2010). *Dismantling contemporary deficit thinking: Educational thought and practice*. Routledge.
- Wieczorek, D., & Manard, C. (2018). Instructional leadership challenges and practices of novice principals in rural schools. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 34(2), 1–21.
- Wolcott, H. F. (1994). *Transforming qualitative data: Description, analysis, and interpretation*. Sage.
- Yin, R.K. (2008). How to do better case studies. In Bickman, Leonard, and Debra J. Rog, (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of applied social research methods*. (pp. 254-282). Sage.
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (Sixth ed.). Sage.
- Zaltman, G., & Duncan, R. (1977). *Strategies for planned change*. Wiley.
- Zepeda S.J., Parylo O., Bengtson E. (2014). Analyzing principal professional development practices through the lens of adult learning theory. *Professional development in education*. 40(2), 295-315. doi:10.1080/19415257.2013.821667

APPENDIX A

School Leader Professional Learning

August 2021

*Purpose: Collectively cultivate a common vision of excellence
among OneClay teachers and leaders*

Agenda

1. Welcome & Check In
 - a. Collective Commitments
 - b. Reflect on fears and hopes from last year
2. Setting the Stage for School Leader PLC Teams
 - a. Benefits
 - b. Groups
 - c. Leadership Journal
 - d. Input from Leaders
3. Review District and ESE Data
 - a. ELA
 - b. Math
 - c. Science
 - d. SS
4. Reaching ALL students
5. Collaborative Teaching and Planning with the Florida Inclusion Network (FIN)
6. Lunch on your own
7. Breakout Groups by Level- 2 Elementary Groups and 1 Secondary (45 minutes each)
 - a. ESE Support Facilitation Models
 - b. Literacy Updates
 - c. Walkthroughs & OneClay Vision
8. Closing and Reflection

School Leader Professional Learning

September 2021

*Purpose: Collectively cultivate a common vision of excellence
among OneClay teachers and leaders*

Agenda

1. Welcome & Check In
 - a. Share Celebrations
 - b. Collective Commitments

2. Reflect on OneClay Vision Implementation
 - a. Yearlong Focus- Acknowledging Students Positively
 - b. Q1 Focus- Communicating Clear Learning Targets and Success Criteria
 - c. Planning for Next Steps

3. School Leader PLCs
 - a. Discuss the Purpose
 - b. Create Norms & PLC Artifact Reflection
 - c. PLC Process Debrief

4. Lunch on your own

5. Breakout Groups (45 minutes each)
 - Math Updates (K-12)
 - Literacy Updates (K-6)
 - Self-directed Collaboration (K-12)

6. Closing and Reflection

School Leader Professional Learning

October 2021

Purpose: Collectively cultivate a common vision of excellence among OneClay teachers and leaders

Agenda

1. Welcome & Connection
 - Share Appreciations
 - Reflect on Connections
2. OneClay Vision Implementation
 - Yearlong Focus- Acknowledging Students Positively
 - Q1 Focus- Communicating Clear Learning Targets and Success Criteria
 - Q2 Focus- Checking for Understanding of Learning Targets
3. School Leader PLCs
 - Discuss the Purpose
 - Examining Student Work from Common Assessments and Leveraging Assets for Learning Gains
 - PLC Process Debrief
4. Lunch on your own
5. Breakout Groups (45 minutes each)
 - Synergy (Gradebooks & Referrals)
 - Lexia Updates
 - Data Monitoring (K-6)
 - Secondary Updates (7-12)
6. Closing and Reflection

School Leader Professional Learning

November 2021

*Purpose: Collectively cultivate a common vision of excellence
among OneClay teachers and leaders*

Agenda

1. Welcome & Connection
 - a. For what are you thankful?
2. OneClay Vision Implementation- Data Update
3. How Principals Affect Students and Schools
 - a. Teacher Feedback, Coaching, and other Professional Learning
 - b. Facilitating Collaboration and Professional Learning Communities
4. Walkthrough Data Reflection & Planning for Second Semester
5. School Leader PLCs
 - a. Examining Student Work from Common Assessments aligned to learning targets
 - b. PLC Process Debrief
6. Lunch on your own
7. Breakout Groups (45 minutes each)
 - a. Climate & Culture
 - b. ESE
 - c. MTSS (K-6) and Secondary Updates (7-12)
8. Closing and Reflection

School Leader Professional Learning

January 2022

Purpose: Collectively cultivate a common vision of excellence among OneClay teachers and leaders

Agenda

1. Welcome & Connection
 - What was the #1 song the day you were born?
 - What does this say about us as a leadership team?
2. OneClay Vision Implementation
 - Data Updates
 - Quarter 3 & 4 Focus- Responding to Assessments aligned to Learning Targets
3. High Quality Walkthrough Feedback
4. School Leader PLCs
 - Mid-Year PLC Team Reflection
 - Team Analysis of Common Assessment (TACA)
 - PLC Process Debrief
5. Lunch on your own
6. Breakout Groups (45 minutes each)
 - Facilities & Contracts
 - Evaluations & HR Processes
 - Data Discussions
7. Closing and Reflection

School Leader Professional Learning

March 2022

Purpose: Collectively cultivate a common vision of excellence among OneClay teachers and leaders

Agenda

1. Welcome & Connection
 - Share two words to describe how you are feeling today
2. OneClay Vision Implementation- Data Updates
3. High Quality Walkthrough Feedback Practice
4. School Leader PLCs
 - Team Plan for Responding to Formative Data
 - PLC Process Debrief
5. Lunch on your own
6. Breakout Groups (45 minutes each)

Principal Breakout Groups:	AP Breakout Groups:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Scheduling to Maximize Student Support ● Best Practices for Hiring ● Assessment Schedules (K-6) ● Secondary Updates (7-12) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Scheduling to Maximize Student Support ● Best Practices for Hiring ● Assessment Schedules (K-6) ● ESE Discipline (7-12)

7. Closing and Reflection

School Leader Professional Learning

April 2022

*Purpose: Collectively cultivate a common vision of excellence
among OneClay teachers and leaders*

Agenda

1. Welcome & Connection- What are your Strengths?
2. OneClay Vision Implementation- Data Updates
3. Barriers and Solutions to Instructional Leadership
4. School Leader PLCs
 - Evidence of Team Success
 - PLC Process Debrief
5. Lunch on your own
6. Breakout Groups (45 minutes each)

Principal Breakout Groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Budget ● School-Based Teacher Support ● Coordinated PLCs and 6th Grade Support (K-6) ● Secondary Updates (7-12) 	AP Breakout Groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Budget ● School-Based Teacher Support ● Coordinated PLCs and 6th Grade Support (K-6) ● Supporting PLC Teams (7-12)
---	---

7. Closing and Reflection

APPENDIX B

September Principal Professional Learning Team Agenda

<p>Agenda <i>Level & Grade</i> Date:</p>	<p>Norms: List the Norms that the Team Creates Here</p>
--	--

Bring:

- An agenda from your focus team
- Example of norms/community agreements and the process used by the team to develop them (may be included on the agenda)
- Baseline data from your Focus Team (in any format the team is already using...there is no need to recreate anything).

<p>Members Present: <i>List Names Here</i></p>		
<p><i>15 minutes</i></p>	<p>Create Team Norms</p>	<p>Suggested Protocol:</p> <p>2 minutes to brainstorm a list of the challenges that PLC teams might typically face (ex: not being prepared, lack of participation, etc.)</p> <p>8 minutes to discuss a list of 3-5 norms that will help your team avoid these common challenges. List at the top of this agenda</p> <p>2 minutes to use fist to five to gain consensus and/or discuss as needed.</p> <p>3 minutes- Discuss team roles: -Will your team use roles (time keeper, recorder, etc.) - Will these roles stay consistent or change each meeting? - How will roles be determined?</p>
<p><i>40 minutes</i></p>	<p>PLC Artifact Reflection</p>	<p>Suggested Protocol:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Select a protocol facilitator/timekeeper and a back up facilitator/timekeeper for when the facilitator is the presenter ● 5 minutes- everyone looks through artifacts (norms, agenda, baseline data) and reflects on these questions

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Which Collaborative Team Actions are evident in each artifact? (norms, agenda, baseline data) ○ Which guiding questions, if any, might be useful in supporting this team's growth? ○ At what stage does this team seem to be operating based on these artifacts? ● Each group member will serve as the presenter for each round of the protocol. ● Each round will take approximately 6 minutes ● For Each Round <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 2 minutes- presenter shares their responses to the questions about the artifacts (listed above). ○ 3 minutes- team members ask questions about the artifacts and discuss next steps for support in alignment with the Collaborative Team Actions ○ 1 minute- presenter shares one way that s/he can support this team in alignment with the Collaborative Team Actions and team's PLC stage ● Repeat each round for each member of the group.
<i>5 minutes</i>	Closing- Group Reflection	<p>Suggested Reflection Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What did you see in the artifacts that were interesting or surprising? ○ What about the process helped you to see and learn these things? ○ What did you learn from listening to your colleagues? ○ What new perspectives did your colleagues provide?

October Principal Professional Learning Team Agenda

Agenda <i>Level & Grade</i> Date:	Norms: List the Norms that the Team Creates Here
---	--

Bring:

- Notes from the [student](#) and [parent](#) interview
- Common Assessment from the PLC Team you are following
 - An example from a student who met the success criteria
 - An example from the student you interviewed

Members Present: <i>List Names Here</i>		
<i>2 minutes</i>	Review Team Norms	Each team member share out: Which one do you want to prioritize today during the meeting? Review roles (facilitator, timekeeper, recorder, etc.)
<i>3 minutes</i>	Share out from Last Month	In 1-2 sentences, share one way you supported your team after our last meeting. (Limiting the response to 1-2 sentences allows everyone to talk and maximizes time).
<i>20 minutes</i>	Common Assessment Reflection	Suggested Protocol: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Select a protocol facilitator/timekeeper ● 5 minutes- Each member independently reviews the common assessment and answers the following questions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. To what standard(s) is this assessment aligned? b. Is the class on pace with the curriculum guide? c. What is the cognitive complexity level of this standard? (For ELA, Math, & Science

		<p>standards --not available for SS-- look up the standard in CPALMS to determine the Depth of Knowledge Complexity Level of the Standard if not listed in the curriculum guide).</p> <p>d. Using the Cognitive Rigor Matrix Resources as a guide, does this assessment meet the rigor of the standard?</p> <p>e. What do you notice about the student work on this assessment?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Group Members share out in rounds, using the structure below. Each round will take approximately 3-4 minutes ● For Each Round <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. 1-2 minutes- presenter shares their responses to the questions about the common assessment & student work (listed above). b. 2 minutes- team members ask questions & discuss the common assessment & student work ● Repeat rounds for each member of the group.
<p>17 minutes</p>	<p>Leveraging Assets for Learning</p>	<p>Suggested Protocol:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 2 minutes- Independently read the excerpt <i>Developing an Asset-Based Approach to Learning</i> ● 3 minutes- Each group member shares an idea that stood out to you about an asset-based approach to learning. ● 2 minutes- Independently review the Leveraging Assets for Learning Protocol ● 10 minutes- Discuss the following questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What are your takeaways from the student and parent interviews?

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What strengths did these conversations reveal about the student? (refer to the Students Strengths and Assets chart for examples of different types of strengths) ○ How might you use or adapt this protocol to support student learning through their strengths? ○ How does this connect to work you are already doing?
<i>3 minutes</i>	Closing- Group Reflection	<p>Suggested Reflection Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. What did you see in the common assessments or the student and parent interview notes that were interesting or surprising? b. What about the process helped you to see and learn these things? c. What did you learn from listening to your colleagues? d. What new perspectives did your colleagues provide?

November Principal Professional Learning Team Agenda

Agenda <i>Level & Grade</i> Date:	Norms: List the Norms that the Team Creates Here
---	---

Bring:

- The learning target and success criteria that were communicated to the students
- A common formative assessment aligned to the learning target
- 3 copies of student work from this assessment

Members Present: <i>List Names Here</i>		
<i>2 minutes</i>	Review Team Norms	Each team member share out: Which norm has been a strength of our PLC team? Which norm could our team continue to develop? Review roles (facilitator, timekeeper, recorder, etc.)
<i>3 minutes</i>	Share out from Last Month	In 1-2 sentences, share one way you supported your team after our last meeting. (Limiting the response to 1-2 sentences allows everyone to talk and maximizes time).
<i>20 minutes</i>	Common Assessment Reflection	Suggested Protocol: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Select a protocol facilitator/timekeeper ● 5 minutes- Each member independently reviews the common assessment and answers the following questions for each reflection category: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. <u>Checking for Understanding of the Learning Target</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. <u>What do you notice about the alignment between the assessment and the learning target?</u> <u>Grade Level Content/Rigorous Tasks</u>

		<p>b. To what standard(s) is this assessment aligned?</p> <p>c. Is the class on pace with the curriculum guide?</p> <p>d. What is the cognitive complexity level of this standard? (For ELA, Math, & Science standards --not available for SS-- look up the standard in CPALMS to determine the Depth of Knowledge Complexity Level of the Standard if not listed in the curriculum guide).</p> <p>e. Using the Cognitive Rigor Matrix Resources as a guide, does this assessment meet the rigor of the standard?</p> <p><u>Demonstration of Understanding</u></p> <p>f. What do you notice about the student work on this assessment?</p> <p>g. What errors or misconceptions do you see in the student work?</p> <p>h. What might be the next steps for each student?</p> <p>Group Members share out in rounds.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Round 1 (5 minutes)- <u>Checking for Understanding of the Learning Target</u>- Each team member shares their noticings about the alignment between the assessment and the learning target • Round 2 (5 minutes)- <u>Grade Level Content/Rigorous Tasks</u>- Each team member shares their noticings about the reflection questions in this category (above) • Round 3 (5 minutes)- <u>Demonstration of Understanding</u>- Each team member shares their noticings about the reflection questions in this category (above)
17 minutes	Identifying Prerequisite Knowledge & Skills	<p>Suggested Protocol:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (1 minutes) Select one learning target that was shared • (1 minute) Identify the standard the learning target supports

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● (5 minutes) Use the curriculum guides (and/or explore the standards progressions linked below) to determine the prerequisite knowledge and skills needed to meet this learning target and/or standard <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Vertical standards progressions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ELA Florida Standards (LAFS) pp. 8-58 ■ ELA BEST Standards- pp. 13-27 ■ Math BEST Standards Progression (scroll down to the bottom of the page) ■ NGSSS Science Standards ● (10 minutes) Discuss the following questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What is the purpose of identifying prerequisite skills? ○ What is your team's readiness level for identifying prerequisite skills in their collaborative work? What evidence supports this? ○ How can you support your team in identifying prerequisite knowledge and skills based on their readiness level?
<i>3 minutes</i>	Closing-Group Reflection	<p>Suggested Reflection Questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. What evidence of team growth have you noticed in the artifacts? b. What about today's process helped you to see this growth? c. What did you learn today from listening to your colleagues?

January Principal Professional Learning Team Agenda

Agenda <i>Level & Grade</i> Date:	Norms: List the Norms that the Team Creates Here
---	---

Bring:

- A mid-year agenda (with a norms review process if possible)- digital or paper
- Team Analysis of Common Assessment (TACA) document(s)- bring evidence of how teams share data from the common assessments aligned to learning targets (can include mid-year data) and how they discuss and plan for responding to the data.

Members Present: <i>List Names Here</i>		
<i>2 minutes</i>	Review Team Norms	Each team member share out: Which norm will be helpful to focus on today? Review roles (facilitator, timekeeper, recorder, etc.)
<i>10 minutes</i>	Team Temperature Check	Use the Team Temperature Check Document to reflect on your work in this administrator PLC team. In 1-2 sentences, share one strength of the team and one next step you can take to help improve the work of our team. Would this tool be helpful for PLC teams in your school? If so, how might you share it?
<i>10 minutes</i>	Mid-Year Agenda Review	Review the mid-year agenda from your team. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Did your focus team review the norms mid-year? If so, how? ● How have your team's agendas changed from the beginning of the year to now? To what do you attribute this change?
<i>20 minutes</i>	Team Analysis of Common Assessments (TACA)	Suggested Protocol: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Select a protocol facilitator/timekeeper

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 5 minutes- Each member independently reviews the TACA documents and determines answers the following questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. What evidence of Collaborative Team Actions do you see in the TACA form? b. What strengths do you notice? c. What next steps could the team take in responding to the assessment data? How might you support them with these steps? ● Group Members share out in rounds, using the structure below. Each round will take approximately 3-4 minutes ● For Each Round <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. 1-2 minutes- presenter shares their responses to the questions about the TACA documents (listed above). b. 2 minutes- team members ask questions & discuss the TACA documents, strengths, and ideas for next steps ● Repeat rounds for each member of the group.
<p><i>3 minutes</i></p>	<p>Closing- Group Reflection</p>	<p>Suggested Reflection Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. What evidence of team growth have you noticed in the artifacts? b. What about today's process helped you to see this growth? c. What did you learn today from listening to your colleagues?

March Principal Professional Learning Team Agenda

Agenda <i>Level & Grade</i> Date:	Norms: List the Norms that the Team Creates Here
---	---

Bring:

- Team Plan for Responding to Formative Data

Members Present: <i>List Names Here</i>		
<i>2 minutes</i>	Review Team Norms	Each team member share out: Which norm will be helpful to focus on today? Review roles (facilitator, timekeeper, recorder, etc.)
<i>5 minutes</i>	Share out from Last Month	In 1-2 sentences, share one way you supported your team after our last meeting. (Limiting the response to 1-2 sentences allows everyone to talk and maximizes time).
<i>10 minutes</i>	Article- Doing it or Doing it Well? Using Data for Learning	Read the article Doing It or Doing It Well? Using Data for Learning . As you read, think about the team you are supporting and their level of data use. In 1-2 sentences, share one idea from the article that stands out to you the most and tell why. Would this article be helpful for PLC teams in your school? If so, how might you share it?
<i>25 minutes</i>	Team Plan for Responding to Formative Data	Suggested Protocol: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select a protocol facilitator/timekeeper • 5 minutes- Each member independently reviews their team’s plan for responding to formative data and determines answers the following questions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. What evidence of Collaborative Team Actions do you see in the team plan for responding to data?

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> b. What strengths do you notice? c. Which of the <i>5 Steps to Doing Data Well</i> from the article do you notice in the team plan? d. What next steps could the team take in responding to the assessment data? How might you support them with these steps? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Group Members share out in rounds, using the structure below. Each round will take approximately 3-4 minutes ● For Each Round <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. 3 minutes- presenter shares their responses to the questions (listed above) about the Team Plan for responding to formative data. b. 2 minutes- team members ask questions & discuss the team plan for responding to formative data, strengths, and ideas for next steps ● Repeat rounds for each member of the group.
<i>3 minutes</i>	Closing- Group Reflection	<p>Suggested Reflection Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. What evidence of team strengths and needs have you noticed in the artifacts? b. What about today's process helped you to see these strengths and needs? c. What did you learn today from listening to your colleagues?

April Principal Professional Learning Team Agenda

<p>Agenda <i>Level & Grade</i> Date:</p>	<p>Norms: List the Norms that the Team Creates Here</p>
--	--

Bring:

- Evidence of Team Success

Members Present: <i>List Names Here</i>		
<i>2 minutes</i>	Review Team Norms	<p>Each team member share out: Which norm will be helpful to focus on today?</p> <p>Review roles (facilitator, timekeeper, recorder, etc.)</p>
<i>5 minutes</i>	Share out from Last Month	In 1-2 sentences, share one way you supported your team after our last meeting. (Limiting the response to 1-2 sentences allows everyone to talk and maximizes time).
<i>15 minutes</i>	Article- One Step at a Time	<p>Read the article One Step at a Time.</p> <p>As you read, think about the team you are supporting and the step at which they are currently performing.</p> <p>Each team member share one quote from the article that stood out to you and share why it was meaningful.</p> <p>Did the article influence the way you think about PLC teams and the progress they make as they deepen their practice? If so, how?</p>
<i>20 minutes</i>	Evidence of Success with Collaborative Team Actions	<p>Suggested Protocol:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Select a protocol facilitator/timekeeper ● 4 minutes- Each member independently reviews the following artifacts and reflects on answers to the questions about each artifact:

		<p>a. Leadership Journal Entries-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ In what areas has your team made progress this year? ■ What action steps have been most successful in supporting your PLC team this year? <p>b. Evidence of Team Success (the artifact you brought)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ To which Collaborative Team Action is this artifact aligned? ■ At what stage did the team begin the year, and at what stage is your team now? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Group Members share their response to these questions in rounds, using the structure below. Each round will take approximately 3-4 minutes ● For Each Round <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. 2 minutes- presenter shares their responses to the questions listed above b. 2 minutes- team members ask questions & discuss the team plan for responding to formative data, strengths, and ideas for next steps ● Repeat rounds for each member of the group.
<i>3 minutes</i>	Closing- Group Reflection	<p>Suggested Reflection Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. What evidence of team strengths and needs have you noticed in the artifacts?

		<p>b. What about today's process helped you to see these strengths and needs?</p> <p>c. What did you learn today from listening to your colleagues?</p>
--	--	---

APPENDIX C

Multi-Case Study Data Collection Protocol

Section A- Overview of the Multi-Case Study

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to understand how principals experience change in a yearlong district designed and facilitated professional learning program by exploring their unique and common facilitators and barriers to change as well as to identify critical connection points between professional learning and change in order to gain insight on the role of principal professional learning within a districtwide approach to leading change in educational systems.

Research Questions

How do principals experience a yearlong professional learning program focused on implementing the district's instructional vision through an asset orientation, strengthening professional learning communities, and fostering high quality literacy instruction?

- a. What changes in knowledge do principals identify in each area?
- b. What changes in beliefs do principals identify in each area?
- c. What changes in practices do principals identify in each area?
- d. What barriers and facilitators to change do principals identify in each area?

Section B- Data Collection Procedures

Multiple Case Procedures: Data collection for four cases will take place over the course of two months, with two weeks of data collection scheduled for each case.

1. Identify the four principals for the multiple-cases and obtain informed consent.
2. Schedule document analysis review dates and three interviews with each principal within a two week period.
 - a. Email verbiage:
Thank you for your participation in this study on principal professional learning and change!

I would like to schedule three 30-minute interviews with you over the next two weeks. Here are topics we will discuss during each interview:

- Interview 1- Understanding your Unique Context
- Interview 2- Personal Change
- Interview 3- Leading Change

Here are several dates and times over the next two weeks that might work for you.

- date & time 1
- date & time 2
- date & time 3
- date & time 4
- date & time 5
- date & time 6

Please let me know if any three of these dates work for you. If we can't find 3 dates from this list, let me know and I will revisit the calendar to find three dates that will work.

Additionally, I would like to conduct these interviews in a location that is most convenient for you. I can come to your school, you can come to my office, or we can meet somewhere else. Please let me know what location works best for you.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns. Looking forward to talking with you!

b. Rescheduling procedures:

Should a principal need to reschedule an interview, if possible, reschedule within the two week period initially designated for this case. However, if this is not possible, reschedule for the closest available date to the initial two week period. Make every effort to conduct all data collection for one case before starting data collection on the next case, however, out of respect for each participant's time, it is not necessary to reschedule interviews with a participant in a subsequent case based on the rescheduling need of a participant in the previous case.

3. Work through one individual case at a time, completing analysis of each case before moving to the next.
4. Conduct cross-case analysis using replication logic after cases 2-4 (Yin, 2018).

Individual Case Procedures: Data collection for each case will take place over the course of a two week period.

1. Initial Document Review

- To inform the development of question probes during the interviews, the following documents for each participant will be reviewed:
 - Walkthrough logs
 - PLC Leadership Journal
 - Principal PLC team agendas
- The following questions will guide the *initial* review of each document
 - Walkthrough logs

- Has the frequency of walkthroughs changed over the course of the year?
- In what ways has teacher practice changed from the beginning of the year to the end of the year?
- In what ways has the walkthrough feedback changed from the beginning of the year to the end of the year?
- PLC Leadership journal
 - How often did the principal use the PLC leadership journal?
 - What takeaways did principals have?
 - What support did principals provide for PLC teams?
 - What commonalities or differences stand out across multiple journal entries?
- Principal PLC Team Agendas
 - Did the principal take notes on the PLC team agendas?
 - If so, what knowledge, beliefs, and practices are reflected in the notes?
 - What commonalities or differences stand out in the knowledge, beliefs and practices made evident through the notes across multiple agendas?

2. Interview Protocol (3 rounds)

- Interview 1: Context
 1. Tell me about a recent challenge and a recent success for you as a principal.
 2. How has your experience as a principal changed, if any, over the past few years?
 3. How would you describe your main priorities as a principal? Have these always been your main priorities? Why or why not?
 4. What unique school factors influence *your* work as a principal that might make your experience different from that of other principals?
- Interview 2: Personal Change (Transformational Learning, Effective PL Features, CBAM, Types of Barriers)
 1. Tell me about your experience in our principal meetings this year. (probe for what was helpful and not helpful about the innovations, learning environment and facilitation)
 2. This year, we focused on three district priorities during our principal meetings. What did you learn, if anything, about:
 - implementing the district's instructional vision through an asset orientation?

- strengthening professional learning communities?
 - fostering high quality literacy instruction?
- 3. What helped you learn these things? or Why didn't you learn?
- 4. Are you doing anything differently now as a result of our principal meetings? Why or why not?
- 5. Do you think about instructional leadership any differently after this year's focus on the three priorities? Why or why not?
- 6. Imagine you were asked to help design and facilitate the principal professional learning for next year, what parts of it would you keep the same and what would you do differently and why?
- Interview 3: Leading Change
 1. What similarities and differences do you see between leading yourself through personal change and leading organizational change?
 2. You mentioned that your experience as a principal has changed over the past few years in the following ways.... would you say that the role of a teacher has changed over the past few years? why or why not?
 3. Your school's walkthrough data show that teacher practice has changed in these ways... What do you think led to these changes?
 4. In our last interview you mentioned the following ways that your practice has recently changed. Do you think your changes have influenced any teacher changes at your school? If so, how? If not, why not?
 5. Do you think your experience in the principal meetings have influenced how you lead change at your school? If so, how? If not, why not?

3. Final Document Review

- The following questions will guide the *final* review of each document
 - Walkthrough logs
 - What evidence reflects the changes in knowledge, beliefs, and practices can be seen in the walkthrough logs?
 - PLC Leadership journal
 - What evidence reflects the changes in knowledge, beliefs, and practices can be seen in the PLC leadership journals?
 - Principal PLC Team Agendas
 - What evidence reflects the changes in knowledge, beliefs, and practices can be seen in the Principal PLC Team agendas?

