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**A STUDY OF TEACHERS' AND ADMINISTRATORS'
PERCEPTIONS OF COLLABORATIVE TEACHER TEAMS AS A
STRATEGY FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

A Dissertation in

Educational Leadership

by

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Abstract

Only a few studies have questioned teachers' perceptions of collaborative professional development work at the elementary level; however there is considerable literature on collaborative teams as a means for professional development. Professional development programs are often diverse in philosophy, each with their own advantages and disadvantages, however the research on high quality professional development seems to support collaboration.

The purpose of this study was to examine elementary teachers' perceptions of collaborative professional development teams. Capturing teachers' perspectives on collaborative practices could potentially provide insight to administrators when creating professional development opportunities for teachers. Are collaborative teams seen (1) as a mechanism for promoting teacher growth, (2) a way to improve their own practice, and (3) a way to improve the practice of their team? In addition, does the principals' control of these collaborative teams (4) have any influence on the teachers' perceived value of these teams, and (5) are the perceptions of the teachers and principals comparable in regards to collaborative professional development teams? The study included five elementary schools in a large urban district where there was a strong commitment to professional development. Two of the five schools participated in face-to-face interviews for in-depth conversations and data collection. Teachers and principals were a part of this case study.

Through data analysis, the participants reported that collaborative teams were a positive means for professional development as they perceived it. The professional development teams were perceived by teachers as being more successful when: 1) there

were opportunities to share in vertical teams, 2) there were structures and adequate time was provided, 3) there was a safe environment, 4) there was trust in colleagues, 5) the work was connected to the goals of the school, and 6) they saw student work improving as a result of their collaborative efforts. In addition, the data revealed that the amount of control that the principal has in creating the collaborative teams does not appear to negatively impact teachers' perceptions of the positive benefits of practice. When teachers felt that their work was purposeful and focused on school goals they were more willing to work in any team configuration that they were assigned to, as this helped them to grow professionally.

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Chapter 1

Background of the Study

The primary focus of all schools is to provide a high quality education to every student. To meet this goal for educational excellence, public schools and school systems today must meet the annual targets set by the Federal Law called the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. The unprecedented demands by the federal government and most recently the Race to the Top grants (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012), have created an age of public accountability where teaching practices are shaped by the pressures to improve student performance on annual standardized tests, with proposed formulas to pay teachers in relation to their students' test scores. Reaching these mandated state and federal testing benchmarks means requiring teachers to be properly prepared to meet the instructional needs of all students (Datnow, 2011). Deciding what instructional methods to use and how to provide quality staff development for teachers is a growing challenge for administrators (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Drago-Severson, 2012). Put simply, the need to improve student achievement, implementing various democratic initiatives to improve school conditions, and providing quality school-based professional development opportunities for educators are at the forefront of the national educational agenda (Drago-Severson, 2012).

In addition to meeting the annual requirements of NCLB, schools today are faced with the changing economic status of America, which has a profound affect on teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond, 1988). School boards must make difficult decisions about how to spend limited state and district dollars, while maintaining a focus on academic

excellence in this high stakes testing environment. In economically challenging times, schools often reduce investments in professional learning (Hord, 2012) in an attempt to balance budgets. Professional development initiatives are often less important to school boards than retaining highly qualified teachers and providing a variety of programs for students (Gilles, Wilson, & Elias, 2010). The level of funding for professional development varies tremendously from site to site. Differences in professional development funding in public school systems can range from less than 1% of the total operating expenses to as great as 12% (Hord, 2012). However, in recent years teacher learning has become an important topic in educational research (Meirink, Imants, Meijer, Verloop, 2010).

Accountability for Professional Development

Faced with accountability pressures to provide high quality instruction to all students, schools and school districts have settled on very different paradigms in responding to these external demands. Finding the appropriate paradigm for leadership is critical as Drago-Severson noted.

Educational leaders nationwide search for ways to grow schools as learning centers that can effectively nurture and sustain the development of adults and children. Leadership that supports teacher learning is critically important in this process. How can we build true learning communities that support the development of adults as well as children, given the complex demands of education in the 21st century? (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 2)

When administrators and instructional leaders focus their attention on classroom practices, their understanding about teacher professional learning can inform their decision-making

processes regarding capacity-building policies (Gallucci, 2008).

Prescriptive Practices

One approach that some districts choose is to increase control over teaching practices and improve curriculum by adopting a specific reform strategy or purchasing a specific set of curricular materials designed to standardize the curriculum. By choosing a proven reform strategy and enforcing uniform standards of instruction and instructional practices through professional development for all teachers, administrators would be setting specific expectations for all teachers in the area of professional development. This approach would seem fitting to schools and districts where administrators want to see teachers implement curriculum with fidelity and ultimately improve student achievement and where administrators tend to see teachers as part of the problem as opposed to part of the solution. This approach would consist of using prescribed curriculum materials and expected teaching practices, thus giving administrators consistent measureable data based on consistent instructional methods, to monitor student learning. Therefore, using prescriptive methods may help schools measure progress linearly toward a defined benchmark. This requires teacher compliance to prescribed key practices for student success. In an era of test-based accountability, the logic of this approach is obvious to some school leaders (Levine & Marcus, 2007).

Yet, years of empirical research point to many flawed reform initiatives that often fail to involve teachers in the reform development processes. The lack of teacher involvement repeatedly neglects the most important stakeholders who are at the heart of academic reform. Inattention to teacher perceptions ultimately undermines the reforms' potential for success. School administrators may choose to increase control over teaching practices

and curriculum by choosing a proven reform strategy and enforcing uniform instructional practices for all teachers, or they may choose a professional development strategy that treats teachers as professionals such as creating teacher teams with the purpose of building instructional capacity while trusting teachers' professional judgment to develop their own curriculum and methods of instructional practice (Levine & Marcus, 2007).

Collaborative Practices

While some schools have adopted teacher-proof, prescribed approaches, others see teachers as potentially being part of the solution as opposed to being a part of the problem. These schools and districts believe that teachers have genuine expertise to share with each other and that collaboration on the part of teachers will lead schools to improved teaching and improved student learning. To accomplish this improvement task, some districts design professional learning around instructional teams in schools with an emphasis on teacher collaboration. Sparks (2000) found that professional development takes place through collaboration across school contexts, regardless of affluence and ethnic diversity. Likewise, many other scholars have found that learning occurs when collaborative leadership is used to break down cultures of isolation and provide access to information through dialogue and reflection in a culture that is supportive of learning and change (Blasé & Blasé, 2001; City et al., 2009; DuFour et al., 2008; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Kruse, 1999; Finnan & Levin, 2000; Rallis & Goldring, 2000; Sergiovanni, 1995; Sipple, 2004).

Professional Learning Communities

This second approach to external accountability and improvement pressures through professional development is often described by researchers and reformers as

“professional learning communities” (Dufur, Eaker, & Dufour, 2005), “inquiry communities” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992a), schools as “communities of learners” (Barth, 1984), “instructional communities of practice” (Supovitz, 2001) and various other themes that name teacher work groups as “learning communities”(Levine, 2010). The term professional learning community focuses on teachers developing shared norms, beliefs, attitudes and trust in their work group. However, not all professional learning communities share the same characteristics. In some cases, the structure and direction of the professional learning community is dictated by administrators, as opposed to being decided upon by teachers. Hargreaves (2012) labels these types of professional learning communities as a form of contrived collegiality. In other cases, professional learning communities develop through teacher led direction and autonomy. Hargreaves labels these professional learning communities as true collaborative cultures. While both types of professional learning communities intend to use teacher collaboration as a vehicle for school improvement, it is not clear that they function equally well in that regard.

High Quality Professional Development

Professional development programs are often diverse in philosophy, each with their own advantages and disadvantages. The research on high quality professional development seems to support the collaborative approach. According to Dufour and Eaker (1998, p. xi), the most promising strategy for sustained, substantive school improvement is developing the ability for school personnel to function as professional learning communities. Schmoker (2006) states that professional learning communities have emerged as the best and most agreed-upon means by which to improve instruction and student performance in schools. Highly effective professional development requires

on-going, intensive opportunities for learning that are embedded in teacher work and subject matter, related to their own students and core subjects. Teacher effectiveness improves when teachers have time to collaborate on student work, share best practices, and plan curriculum and lessons together (Darling-Hammond, 2009; Darling-Hammond, Wei, Richardson, Andee, & Orpanos, 2009). This age of accountability has changed the culture of teaching in many ways. Hargreaves' (1994) teachings about the importance of teacher collaboration (and its twin, contrived collegiality) continue to have significant understandings for us about how teachers work together (or not) to increase student achievement. Decades of school improvement research have revealed that teacher collaboration and collegiality are keys to sustained school improvement. While many schools attempt to promote teacher collaboration and community, just what, and how teachers actually learn in these communities remains something of a black box to school leaders (Little, 2002).

Purpose of the Study

While there is much research to support the need for collaborative instructional teams and collegial practices, teachers' perceptions regarding this practice of collaborative work is not well documented at the elementary level. There is good reason to attend more closely to the accounts of teachers if schools intend to develop rich professional development experiences for teachers that significantly impact student learning. To positively change teacher practice we must understand those people who are in the classroom each day. "Successful and sustainable improvement can therefore never be done to or even for teachers. It can only ever be achieved by and with them." (Hargreaves and Fullan, p. 45, 2012). Schools must find a middle ground between prescriptive

methods and individual autonomy. With this decision in mind, it is important to ask if professional development is better when a community of teachers' work together to discuss and reflect on their practice. This study examines teacher perceptions regarding the use of teams as a vehicle for professional development.

Statement of the Research Problem and Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine elementary teachers' perceptions of collaborative professional development teams. Understanding collaborative practices from the teacher's perspective will provide insight to administrators when creating professional development opportunities for teachers. This study examined these specific questions:

1. To what extent do elementary teachers view working in collaborative professional development teams as a mechanism for promoting teacher growth?
2. Do elementary teachers believe that their involvement in collaborative professional development teams has improved their practice?
3. Does the perceived role of the elementary administrator in creating collaborative professional development teams impact teacher perceptions concerning the potential of those teams to impact their practice?
4. Does the perceived amount of control that the principal exerts in sustaining the work of collaborative professional development teams influence teacher perceptions of the value of those teams?
5. How do the perceptions of elementary teachers concerning collaborative professional teams compare with the perceptions of elementary school principals?

The perspective of the elementary school principal is also considered in this study to see if there are relationships between teacher perceptions of collaborative professional development teams and the intended outcomes of collaborative professional development as designed by the administrators in the school setting. This study helps understand teacher and administrator perceptions of the benefits of collaborative professional development teams within schools, if any, and give voice to teachers regarding the implementation and creation of collaborative professional development practices in their schools. Understanding teacher perceptions of professional development practices will help administrators focus their school improvement efforts. While there is much research to support teacher collaboration, there is little research that has focused on teacher perceptions regarding collaborative professional development practices.

Significance of the Study

This study is designed to examine the importance of teachers' perceptions, specifically at the elementary level, concerning collaborative professional development opportunities in schools. Research indicates that meaningful and relevant professional development should involve the learners (teachers) in the identification of what is to be learned and in the development of the actual learning process and the learning opportunity (Borko & Putman, 1995; Little, 1993; Miller et al., 1994; Tilleman & Imants, 1995; Wisconsin Center for Educational Research [WCER], 2004-2005). Lack of teacher involvement can lead to cynicism and detachment from school improvement efforts (Guskey, 1995; Hargreaves, 1995). This lack of involvement may also reduce professional capital in the school and district. Policymakers, administrators, principals, teachers and central office administrators who make decisions related to elementary professional development

opportunities for staff and its impact on student achievement may find this study useful. Teacher involvement in reform efforts has been identified as a critical factor in successful reform initiatives nationally and should therefore be a relevant factor in the design of professional development models. While teacher involvement may be an important factor in reform efforts, administrators who are making decisions regarding professional development opportunities in their schools often overlook teacher input. School leaders often choose what appears to be a quick fix to improve standardized test scores in their schools, while missing the mark on developing meaningful and purposeful professional development models for their staff. “We know that when a principal employs practices that support teacher learning, teachers thrive (Ackerman & Mackenzie, 2007; Blase & Blase, 2001; Donaldson, 2006, 2008; Kegan & Lahey, 2009)—and we know, too, that such supports benefit students and student achievement (Guskey, 1999; Roy, 2005)” (Drago-Severson, 2012). By looking closely at teachers’ perceptions concerning collaborative professional development, schools may be able to target improvement initiatives that will be long lasting and build professional capacity in schools. While previous research has focused on professional development concerns regarding middle and high school teams of teachers, this study provides information on the significance of collaborative professional development through the lens of the elementary school teacher. School administrators who are responsible for making decisions related to elementary professional development will benefit from this study and be able to differentiate professional development offerings in their schools based on teacher perceptions and collaborative professional development teams in the future.

Definition of Terms

Collaboration:

Learning together and constructing meaning together is the root of collaborative work. It involves having continuing conversations that generate ideas together, inquiring about ideas together, reflecting and making new meanings about new information, and developing shared beliefs.

Collaborative Teams:

Collaborative teams are found when two or more teachers plan instruction or work collaboratively on a given topic. Members of a collaborative team may all teach the same grade or subject or may teach a variety of grades or subjects but work together as a collaborative team for a specific topic or planning purpose.

Contrived Collegiality:

A false attitude of collaboration among professional associates. “Contrived collegiality is characterized by formal, specific bureaucratic procedures to increase the attention being given to joint teacher planning and other forms of working together.” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p.119)

Instructional Teams:

Instructional teaching teams are found where two or more teachers collaboratively teach and plan instruction for a group of students. Members of an instructional teaching team may teach one subject to multiple classes or may teach all core subjects to a single grade of students for the school year. Teachers on instructional teams meet frequently to discuss student strengths and weaknesses and to plan instruction.

Job Embedded Learning:

Learning and engaging in school change efforts tends to improve when these efforts are directly linked to daily practice. Establishing a better connection between learning and doing increases meaning for teachers, which can positively impact students (Loucks-Horsley, 1995).

Learning communities:

Teacher learning communities are united by their strong commitment to student learning and a corresponding inclination to inquire deeply into matters of teaching and learning (Little, 2007, p.54). It refers to the teachers' joint efforts to generate new knowledge of practice and their mutual support of each other's professional growth (McLaughlin and Talbert, 2001).

Professional Capital:

The systemic development and integration of three kinds of capital- human, social, and decisional- into the teaching profession. It is a collective responsibility for teacher growth and development, with focus on student learning as a professional mission.

Professional Development:

Professional development is a systematic effort with the intent to create change in instructional practices in teachers, in their beliefs and attitudes regarding their teaching practices, and ultimately, in the learning outcomes of students.

Teachers Perceptions:

Teachers' viewpoint and personal beliefs about their teaching practice and their teaching position. Perceptions also include judgments that a person accepts as true based on their

experiences in life. The act or faculty of apprehending by means of the senses or the mind; cognition; awareness.

Summary

Chapter 1 was a presentation of the background of the study, professional development accountability issues that affect schools, an overview of high quality professional development choices, and the purpose of the study. The primary research questions were also presented. Specifics regarding the research design and data collection process of the study will be presented in detail in Chapter 3 of this paper.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

The intent of this chapter is to develop a synthesis of the literature that will serve as the foundation for the study, which focuses on teacher and administrator perceptions of collaborative professional development teams. Specifically, this chapter examines the literature in regard to the sociocultural theory as it relates to underpinnings of professional development aimed at enhancing teacher learning. This chapter also reviews the general research concerning the development of high quality professional development programs in collaborative school cultures and the role of the principal as it relates to the development of meaningful professional development opportunities for teachers. While there are many sociocultural theorists with contrasting views in regards to learning, a brief overview of sociocultural theorists as it relates to teacher learning, is presented first. Those theorists that focused their work on teaching and learning, as it relates to education, teacher learning and teacher leading, were included in this research to help the researcher focus on collaborative professional development practices in contemporary education.

Sociocultural Theory as a Conceptual Framework for Teacher Learning

Sociocultural theories characterize learning that is relevant to social practice stance on organizational learning (Gallucci, 2008). These theories assume that learning takes place in everyday social contexts and that the learning itself takes place through communities of learners rather than through individual understanding of concepts separate from the group interactions and experiences (Rogoff, et al, 1995). Sociocultural theorists believe that learning is an inherently social and collective phenomenon, therefore suggesting that

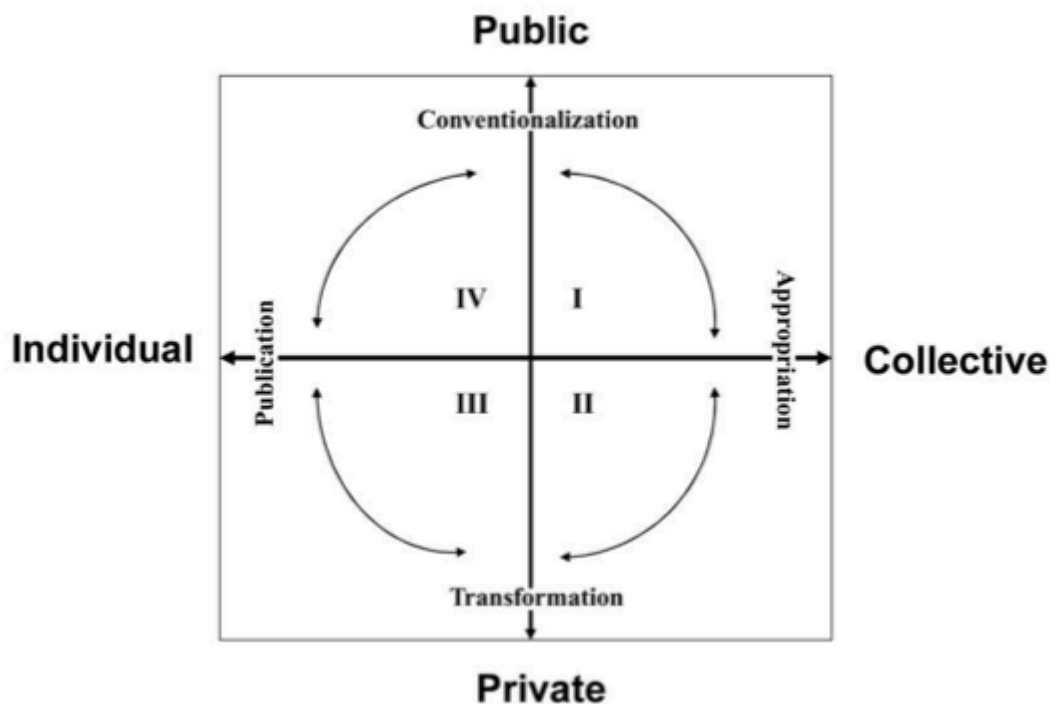
analysis of learning move from the individual (Simon, 1991), to units of participation, interaction, and activity of learning (Gallucci, 2007; Engestrom, 1999; Rogoff, 1995; Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Organizations, such as school districts, are very complex systems influenced by internal conflict and ambiguity as well as diverse political forces (Hubbard, et al 2006). Just how professional learning is supported, in school district organizational contexts and how professional development is effectively created in an organization, can be thought of in terms of “organizational learning”. The term implies that the organization learns collectively and that individuals learn from each other and the group as a whole (Gallucci, 2008). Honig, (2008) believes that ideas from both sociocultural learning theory and organizational learning theory may provide important conceptual understandings for schools districts. These theoretical areas can be helpful because each area focuses learning on two complementary dimensions of how professional learning in school districts may occur. Sociocultural learning theory highlights the importance of collaborative professional development experiences in schools to support teaching and learning improvement efforts, while organizational learning theory focuses on how building principals may use evidence from collaborative professional development experiences to their school improvement planning (Honig, 2008).

Sociocultural theory has its roots in the work of Lev Vygotsky’s work known as the “Vygotsky Space”. Lev Vygotsky (1978) describes learning as the internalization and transformation of cultural tools that take place when individuals participate in social practices (Gallucci, 2007). Vygotsky provides the theoretical structure for considering collaboration as a social process in which meaning is constructed from discussion among

group members (Drucker, 1999; John-Steiner, 1998; Gray, 1989). He theorized that man learns through social engagements with others and that knowledge construction is a social, cooperative venture. The “Vygotsky Space” represents individual learning and collective learning and between private and public domains of actions (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1: The Vygotsky Space



Vygotsky Space (adapted from Gavelek and Raphael 1996; Harré 1984; McVee et al.2005) Gallucci 2008, p. 548-549.

These four quadrants are conceptualized as a four phase process through which cultural practices are internalized by the individual, transformed in the context of individual needs and uses, then externalized (shared) in ways that may be taken up by others (Gallucci, 2008, p. 548-549). Both learning and change occur in a cumulative and transactional way in both the individual and collective levels in this cyclical and

evolutionary process. Gallucci (2008) discusses the iterative stages of this ongoing process as follows:

- Individual appropriation of particular ways of thinking through interaction with others.
- Individual transformation and ownership of that thinking in the context of one's own work.
- Publication of new learning through talk or action.
- The process whereby those public acts become conventionalized in the practice of that individual, in the work of others, or both.

The Vygotsky Space can help us to understand how collaborative events such as district professional development practices can serve as opportunities for the introduction of new ideas for instruction (quadrant 1). The new professional development ideas and concepts are shared and interpreted by the individual teachers (quadrant 2). At this point in the professional development phase, some teachers may readily experiment with their new concepts in practice, while others may question or reject the new ideas altogether. Still others may work to reinterpret the new concepts and practices to fit their own context of teaching, therefore, transforming their practices (quadrant 3). As the teachers implement and discuss their new learning in collaborative groups, either formal or informal conversations, there is potential for individual learning and to connect to other teachers in the organization (quadrant 4). When the individual's learning is taken up by others, for example; a grade level team, the school, or administrators, it has the potential to affect future learning and thus, return the cycle of learning back to quadrant 1 (Gallucci, 2008).

Therefore, drawing on sociocultural theories of learning, some researchers have

described supports for schools that foster system-wide changes, such as developing common language around curriculum and instruction, developing opportunities for adults to share with others who possess relevant expertise, and by differentiating adult learning (Gallucci, 2007). Knowledge is the act of conversing according to Stacey (2001). Learning takes place when conversations and relationships change. Knowledge capacity of an organization is then dependent on the relationships of its members. “Knowledge is built up in the relations between human beings” (Freire, 1973, p. 109). Through such relationships, learners can socially construct the meaning of particular ideas. Learners may also develop and potentially shape the habits of mind of their community (Wertsch 1998). “The active construction of meaning unfolds not within individuals’ minds but as individuals interact with one another and with problems of practice” (Vygotsky 1978). Through social interactions within communities of practice, individuals can in fact, increase the individual and collective knowledge that they bring to their collective community (Honig, 2008;Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger 1998).

Sociocultural Theory and Teacher Learning

By understanding the theoretical assumptions around sociocultural thinking, and the influences of collaborative experiences in learning, educators may be able to create improved professional development practices for teachers that have lasting results for schools. Mezirow (2000) found the following:

“A defining condition of being human is our urgent need to understand and order the meaning of our experience, to integrate it with what we know to avoid the threat of chaos. If we are unable to understand, we often turn to tradition, thoughtlessly size explanations by authority figures, or resort to various

psychological mechanisms, such as projection and rationalization, to create imaginary meanings.” (p. 1)

Collaborative professional work or communities of practice is also referred to as “joint work” (Little, 1990; Honig, 2008). When participants help others engage in what sociocultural learning theorists call “joint work,” a “joint enterprise,” or an “authentic situation”, they deepen their work (Rogoff 1994; Rogoff et al. 1995; Wenger 1998). Joint work or collaborative work, refers to the activities that the particular community members value both in the present time and over time. According to Herrenkohl, 2008, people convey meanings to one another and work to share understanding and perspective, therefore the success of organized efforts, such as collaborative or joint work, requires these activities. However, at the same time, we need to accommodate alternative viewpoints, innovations, and new knowledge. Honig, (2008) believes that the concept of joint work, in terms of policy, could include the overall challenge of improving teaching and learning school districts. Therefore, when teachers engage in communities of practice they struggle with whether and how to attend to new learning and how to make learning meaningful and actionable. Teacher learning is complicated by both individual personalities and organizational conditions (Gallucci, 2008).

High Quality Professional Development

“High quality professional development is a central component in nearly every modern proposal for improving education” (Guskey, 2002, p. 381). Professional development programs are systematic efforts with the intent to create change in instructional practices in teachers, in their beliefs and attitudes regarding their teaching practices, and ultimately, in the learning outcomes of students. According the report

prepared by Linda Darling-Hammond, Ruth Chung Wei, Alethea Andree, Nikole Richardson, and Stelios Orphanos of Stanford University, on the status of professional development in the United States (NSDC, 2009), key findings in effective professional development programs include the following four components:

1. Professional development should be intensive, ongoing, and connected to practice.
2. Professional development should focus on student learning and address the teaching of specific curriculum content.
3. Professional development should align with school improvement priorities and goals.
4. Professional development should build strong working relationships among teachers.

Research has shown that teachers demonstrate a strongly individualistic ethos, due to the nature of their daily work being predominately isolated from the work of their peers. This “egg-crate” model of instruction in the American teaching profession has not allowed for the development of strong, professional collaboration in schools. While the intent of professional development programs remains the same regardless of their content and format, reviews of professional development programs consistently point out the ineffectiveness of most programs (Cohen & Hill, 1998, 2000; Kennedy, 1998; Wang et al., 1999). Many factors contribute to this ineffectiveness, however it has been suggested that there are two critical factors that identify these failures: “(1) what motivates teachers to engage in professional development, and (2) the process by which change in teachers typically occurs” (Guskey, 1986, Guskey, 2002, p. 382). In a study of mathematics

reform in California, Cohen and Hill (2000) argue that ongoing teacher learning is the key to teaching and learning. They believe that professional development that works is school-based and embedded in the daily work of the teachers. Other scholars suggest that effective professional development for teachers should contain the following components:

(1) embedded in and derived from practice, (2) ongoing rather than one-shot experiences, (3) on-site and school based, (4) focused on student achievement, (5) integrated with school reform processes, (6) centered around teacher collaboration, and (7) sensitive to teachers' learning needs (Hawley & Valli, 1999). Killion (2000a) recommends re-evaluating traditional professional development, since teachers prefer informal opportunities that occur spontaneously in the school. (Drago-Severson, 2007)

Still others have argued that there is a lack of clarity or even consensus surrounding the topic of professional development and how teacher growth can be supported and implemented (Brookfield, 1995; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001; Cranton, 1996; Drago-Severson, 1994, 1996, 2004a; Mezirow, 2000a). Therefore, researchers and theorists need to focus on individuals' meaning making (Kegan, 1982, 1994). Fullan believes that we should be investigating ideas that help teachers develop their own thinking, rather than "programs" (2003, p. 26). This thinking is echoed in the NSCD 2009 report:

However, research shows that when schools are strategic in creating time and productive working relationships within academic departments or grade levels, across them, or among teachers school-wide, the benefits can include greater

consistency in instruction, more willingness to share practices and try new ways of teaching, and more success in solving problems of practice. (p.11)

Professional Learning Communities

Another important lens to view the research regarding professional development focuses on the context of teachers' work in schools. Cuban (1992) suggested that professional communities were a central part of teachers' professionalism. Professional learning communities are those that contain mutual collaboration, emotional support, personal growth, and a synergy of efforts DuFour & Eaker, (1998). Working together in collaborative groups provides teachers with a platform for discussing and resolving issues related to their own teaching experiences. Teachers who share problems and work collectively, received support in dealing with daily challenges in the classroom, improved their practice, and fostered a higher degree of professionalism. McLaughlin and Talbert (1993) looked at professional learning communities through the context of school reform and the connection between student achievement and teacher professional learning. Other researchers like Darling-Hammond et al. 1994), and Louis, Marks, and Kruse (1996), studied the notion of professional communities to create effective schools. These researchers believed that developing capacity among teachers in schools, provided the best way to improve schools, rather than focusing on reform efforts to impose new school structures and new curriculum. They believed that fostering professional learning through collaborative and meaningful work, schools could bring about more systemic change in schools and ultimately make meaningful change in adult and student learning.

Teachers who are reluctant to participate in collaborative groups may feel that they have nothing to offer others as well as being reluctant to receive help. McTaggart (1989)

interviewed a teacher who shared these concerns. The teacher did not want to go into a meeting and say that she knew how to do things better than others. If she did share a success it always ended with how she could have done it better. This fear of sharing is rooted in the traditional role of teachers and persists due to the individualism created in egg-crate classroom conditions that are long standing in education. Holding back on expertise and reluctance to share are pervasive issues with teachers, according to Lortie (1975). Individualism and isolation leads to non-risk taking and feelings of being powerless in the face of day-to-day pressures. All of these issues make it hard for teachers to break free of the safety of their classrooms and work together.

Still other teachers feel that planning time should be for the focus of their own classroom needs. Time for collaboration is seen as time taken away from their professional duties of lesson planning and gathering resources for students. Still other teachers wonder how they can be expected to share with and help others when they have their own self imposed pressures and aspirations of the daily demands of teaching. Fullan and Hargreaves (1996) point out that the isolation of the classroom can be a refuge from collegial judgments regarding their practice.

According to Fullan and Hargreaves (1996, p.39), we need to “crack the walls of privatism” in schools to bring lasting change. Collaboration fails when teachers are afraid to share their ideas and successes for fear of being seen as bragging. Others are afraid to share new ideas or strategies for fear that others will take credit for their work. Another flaw in collaborative groups is that teachers often associate these meetings with evaluative conversations. Therefore, some teachers equate collaboration with control.

To truly understand schools, we must understand them as teachers do. Schools are social organizations and these social organizations vary considerably from school to school. Teachers who are a part of these organizations shape their beliefs and actions in conformance with the policies, structures and traditions of their school culture (Rosenholtz, 1991). Teachers begin to define their workplace realities through a set of shared norms, attitudes and behaviors constructed through day-to-day work experiences. Through communication, teachers can learn new conceptions of their work. Many years ago Willard Waller wrote a book called *The Sociology of Teaching* (1932/1967), where he stated (Siskin and Little, 1995):

What this book tells is what every teacher knows, that the world of school is a social world. Those human beings who live together in the school, though deeply severed in one sense, nevertheless spin a tangled web of interrelationships; that web and people in it make up the social world of school....For let no one be deceived, the important things that happen in schools result from the interaction of personalities. (p.1)

-Willard Waller, 1932/1967

Despite the strong desire to implement collaborative communities in schools, many efforts to promote collaborative work among teachers have gone awry because school leaders underestimate the micro-politics of schools (Hargreaves, 1994). Hord (1997) believes that effective professional learning communities should include: (1) the facilitative participation of the principal with intentional shared leadership; (2) a shared vision toward the goal of student learning, which is continuously articulated and referenced; (3) shared learning among staff with application toward improvement of

student learning; (4) peer review and visitation of classrooms with supportive feedback; and (5) human and capital resources to support the endeavor. This type of job-embedded collaborative learning that is highly effective is an uncommon feature in most states, districts and schools in the United States (NSDC, 2009, p.4). Mezirow (2000) describes our culture as being against collaborative thinking. That society has conditioned us to think adversarially in terms of winning and losing rather than in a collaborative spirit.

According to Rosenholtz (1989) teachers in collaborative schools learned to teach far easier and better than in other schools. Collaborative schools were also places where teachers sought ideas from their peers and shared expertise and experiences with others. Teachers in collaborative schools had more confidence in their teaching and were committed to continuous improvement. Little (1989) believes that teachers can actually become better teachers just by being a part of a faculty in a collaborative school. The power of a collaborative workplace can make positive changes for everyone involved.

Collaborative School Cultures

We must therefore, be sure to look at the various forms that collaboration and collegiality can take in school cultures. In collaborative cultures, working relationships between teachers tend to be spontaneous, voluntary, development-oriented, pervasive across time and space, and unpredictable. These cultures are incompatible with “school systems where decisions about curriculum and evaluation are highly centralized” (Hargreaves 1994, p. 193). Contrived collegiality is administratively regulated, compulsory, implementation-oriented, fixed in time and space, and predictable. Therefore, this type collaboration among teachers rarely leads to meaningful or sustainable change in student achievement. Additionally, in schools where goals are ambiguous and there is

no clear direction or common sense of purpose, teachers feel uncertain about the school culture and about their own instructional practices (Azumi & Madhere, 1983; Glidewell et al., 1983). Teachers who feel uncertain about goals and direction often avoid situations like collaborating with peers as they feel their inadequacy may be disclosed.

In a study of seventy eight elementary schools in Tennessee, Rosenholtz (1989) talks about two types of schools. One type of school she calls “stuck” or “learning impoverished”, where teachers usually worked alone and were not supportive of change or improvements. The second type of school she calls a “moving” school or “learning enriched” school. In this type of school she found that teachers worked together more. Teachers in the “moving” schools shared that teaching was difficult and that everyone needs help to continue to grow and learn, even the veteran teachers. In these schools it was safe to give and receive help in their united efforts to improve student achievement. Teachers in these schools valued collaboration and were more willing to trust others, share expertise, seek advice from others, and willingly give help to colleagues both during and beyond the school day. Rosenholtz found that collaborative schools had a positive impact on the uncertainty of the job. Ashton and Webb (1986) mirror that finding, saying that the main benefit of collaboration is an increase their sense of efficacy. Their study was focused on middle level teachers, however the results of collaboration for these teachers reduced feelings of powerlessness and increased their shared decision-making in the organization.

Rosenholtz’s (1991) research indicates that collaborative schools do better than individualistic ones do. Teachers who are a part of professional cultures of collaboration tend to perform better than teachers who work alone. Professionals that are a part of high

performing collaborative teams understand the power of their team, they support the development of their team and they respect the power of their collective responsibility. It means teachers are improving as individuals while raising the performance level of their team, which in turn raises the quality of the entire profession.

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) discuss a concept that they hope will change the way educators think about teaching, the quality of teaching, and how to develop quality teaching. They refer to this concept as *professional capital* (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). Building professional capital is about the collective responsibility teachers share, not individual autonomy. This idea of building professional capital is a growing theme in colleges and universities across the country as well. Professional development that emphasizes inquiry-based instruction, coaching and mentoring, and offers a broader perspective of schools through collaborative work with school leaders or job-embedded research projects, fill an important need in developing professional capacity today. Badaili, agrees that such programs can foster a sense of “stewardship”, the idea that teachers are responsible for their own classrooms and beyond (Rebora, 2012, p. 17). He goes on to suggest that teachers who earn leadership credentials can help to “raise the collective IQ of a school” (2012). Therefore, improving the individual teacher will, in turn, improve the entire teaching team. Building professional capital in schools means supporting and working with every teacher and transforming an entire system (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012, p. 14).

The professional capital view of teaching assumes that:

- Good teaching is technically sophisticated and difficult.
- Good teaching requires high levels of education and long periods of training.

- Good teaching is perfected through continuous improvement.
- Good teaching involves wise judgment informed by evidence and experience.
- Good teaching is a collective accomplishment and responsibility.
- Good teaching maximizes, mediates, and moderates online instruction.

Lambert reminds us that “as long as improvement is dependent on a single person or a few people or outside directions and forces, it will fail” (1998, p. 3). Schools need to engage a significant number of teachers who understand the shared vision of the school and the full scale of the work required to make significant change. Powerful and productive professional development is about engaging teachers in conversations about their collective responsibility, not individual autonomy. It is about learning together, constructing meaning together, and working collaboratively toward a common goal. Collaborative school cultures emphasize active sharing of teaching experiences, planning units and lessons together, discussing successes and failures, reviewing student work samples, and asking for and giving each other help. Sharing rather than isolation, defines this type of culture (Hill, 1995).

The Principal’s Role in Professional Development

“The function of leadership must be to engage people in the process that creates the conditions for learning and form a common ground about teaching and learning” (Lambert et al ,2002, p.35). According to Lambert, constructivist leadership is a reciprocal process by which the participants in an educational setting construct meanings that lead toward a shared purpose of schooling (2002).

Bound by rules, schedules, accountability policies, hierarchical roles, and timeworn practices, educators still experience cultures that limit interaction and

mitigate against professional growth. They have few opportunities to engage in the reciprocal processes that would call forth their ideas and successful experiences and enable them to make sense of their world together. (p. 35)

The concept of constructivist leadership attends to the same ideas that are the underpinnings for constructivist learning: learning is based on the process of meaning making, inquiry, participation and reflection. Leading and learning are very connected in the role of the principal. Leadership can therefore be thought of as a reciprocal process where purposeful learning takes place in a community of learners. Constructivist leaders demonstrate the following traits according to Lambert, (p. 2, 2003): They seek and value teachers' points of view; they structure the concept of leadership to challenge teachers' belief systems; they construct meaning through reflection and dialogue; they structure the life of the school around big picture, not a singular event of small piece of information; and they assess teacher learning in the context of the complexity of the learning organization, not outcomes of isolated events. The constructivist leader attends to the learning of the students as well as the learning needs of the adults, thus creating a true community of learners in the school setting.

However, professional development in schools has typically not included teacher input. Furthermore, teachers are rarely responsible for their own learning, rather they must comply with school and district professional development guidelines and requirements whether they need the prescribed training or not. Schools must become places that support good teaching and learning. The need for a systemic change in designing appropriate professional development for teachers is needed if we want to create environments where teachers can do the serious work of learning as professionals.

According to Darling-Hammond, 2006, schools in most high-achieving countries provide teachers with 10 to 20 hours per week for collaboration, team planning, lesson study, peer coaching, developing curriculum and assessments, and examining student work together. Schools in the United States that have embraced these practices in professional development have been more successful, been able to attract and retain well-qualified teachers, and have been found to be satisfying places to learn and work.

Researchers agree that when a principal supports teacher learning and growth, teachers improve (Blase & Blase, 2001, 1999). Likewise, Osterman and Kottkamp (1993) write that “. . . collaborative approaches provide access to more relevant information and alternative perspectives, promote reflective practice, help develop a culture that supports learning and growth, and facilitate change by virtue of the encouragement and validation of changes that occur” (p. 76).

Principals need to build capacity in their schools on reciprocal learning processes that enable teachers to construct knowledge and meanings toward a shared purpose of schooling. Shared learning creates a shared purpose, which is the foundation for the democratization of schools. This collaborative endeavor in leading learning in schools releases the authority of one to the empowerment of the staff (Lambert, 1998). The principal’s place in this approach is as facilitator rather than as authority figure (Blase & Blase, 2001; Fullan, 2003).

Conclusion

As discussed earlier, research that spans more than two decades of work records the concerns as well as the benefits of collegial learning communities in schools, yet very little, if any research exists on teachers’ perceptions of collaborative professional

development at the elementary level. In fact, most research on teaching teams and collaborative professional development efforts have focused on professional practice at the secondary level.

An empirical study by Song (2009), looked at how professional learning communities influence teachers' perceptions of the value of the reforms in mainland China. This study focused on secondary schools where teachers were surveyed regarding their perceptions of reform regarding collegial learning and collaborative cultures where teachers were encouraged to participate in the curriculum reforms in their schools. Song found that the establishment of professional learning communities was critical in helping teachers to feel empowered and more receptive to curriculum reform efforts. Teacher collaboration created a culture of professional sharing rather than isolation.

Another study that looked at teachers in grades K-12, focused on teacher perceptions of the long-term impacts of engaging in collaborative action research (Goodnough, 2010). In this study, experienced teachers engaged in teacher-directed action research. Participating teachers reported positive benefits of this collaborative experience related to their understanding of themselves as teachers, the nature of their subject matter and student learning, and their classroom practice. It was found that collaborative action research provides a format to engage teachers in communities of practice that foster teacher reflection on their perceptions, beliefs, and practices. The benefits of collaborative action research is one way that can lead to classroom-based change as well as personal and professional growth.

Therefore, the need for examining teachers' perceptions in designing collaborative professional development at the elementary level is critical in creating quality teaching

and learning for our students. Professional development must therefore be a persistent collective enterprise focused on interactions among and between teachers and administrators that are focused on collaborative learning which in turn benefits student learning.

Summary

This chapter reviewed the literature in regard to sociocultural theory as it relates to underpinnings of professional development aimed at enhancing teacher learning. The chapter also reviewed the general research concerning professional development programs, collaborative school cultures, and the role of the principal in developing collaborative professional development opportunities for teachers.

Chapter 3

Statement of the Research Problem

The purpose of this study is to examine elementary teachers' perceptions of collaborative professional development teams. Understanding collaborative professional development practices from the teacher's perspective will provide insight to administrators when creating professional development opportunities for teachers. This study examined these specific questions:

1. To what extent do elementary teachers view working in collaborative professional development teams as a mechanism for promoting teacher growth?
2. Do elementary teachers believe that their involvement in collaborative professional development teams has improved their practice?
3. Does the perceived role of the elementary administrator in creating collaborative professional development teams impact teacher perceptions concerning the potential of those teams to impact their practice?
4. Does the perceived amount of control that the principal exerts in sustaining the work of collaborative professional development teams influence teacher perceptions of the value of those teams?
5. How do the perceptions of elementary teachers concerning collaborative professional teams compare with the perceptions of elementary school principals?

The perspective of elementary school principals was also considered in this study to see if there are relationships between the perceptions of teacher collaborative professional

teams and the intended outcomes of professional development collaboration as designed by the administrators in the school setting.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study strategy in which the researcher explored teachers' perceptions of collaborative professional development teams. Qualitative researchers explore a program, an event or activity, or a process in depth (Creswell, 2003). The case study is an investigation of one entity or experience that is defined by time and place (McMillan, 2012). In this study, the single entity is the elementary school itself, within the district setting. Each of the participating elementary schools is considered a unit of study in itself where inquiry was conducted to understand the participant perceptions regarding collaborative professional development as it is implemented within that specific school setting. The research process examined the experience of each participant and recognizes that each participant has a specific relationship with the professional development activities in his/her own school and with their building administrator.

Context and Selection of Schools

This study was conducted in a Northeastern state with a large urban school district that was familiar to the researcher. The district was established in 1836 and serves a diverse population of approximately 11,500 students: 58.3% Hispanic, 18.5% African American, 15.4% Caucasian, 7.8% Asian/other. The district is comprised of an early childhood center, thirteen elementary schools, four middle schools, one high school campus, and several other alternative sites. It employs approximately 1,585 staff members, including administrators, teachers, counselors, and support staff. The district's

operating budget totals \$180 million. The district has had a longstanding commitment to providing professional development for the teaching staff. This commitment includes a recent investment of over \$2 million dollars in their Theory of Action programs to improve literacy. The district is also proud of the many teachers who are in pursuit of the National Board Certification, which is a nationally recognized mark of excellence in the world of education. With its strong commitment to professional development for all teachers, the district provides an early release program for students one time per month for the purpose of district wide professional development. The district also provides a half hour required planning time for all teachers every morning. The focus of the required half hour daily planning time is decided by the building principal in each school.

For the purpose of this study, six of the thirteen elementary schools in the district were selected to participate in the study based on the willingness of the school district administrations. Specifically, the schools in this study were identified by professional colleagues or the researcher as schools where the building administrator would be willing to have staff participate in the research. The district was also selected because of its ongoing commitment to monthly professional development opportunities for the teachers. With the superintendent's permission, staff members and the building administrator from the selected schools in the district were asked to participate in this study to look at the differences in teacher perspectives at each site. Therefore, the goal of the researcher was to have six of the thirteen elementary schools in this large urban school district participate in the research study.

School Selection

Prior to the implementation of the study the researcher requested permission in writing from the district superintendent (Appendix A). Initially, six of the thirteen elementary schools in the district were invited to participate in the survey portion of the study. One month after the initial invitation was sent out, only three of the six schools had agreed to participate in the study. With the permission of the superintendent, the survey distribution was extended to two more schools. In the end, eight of the thirteen elementary schools in the district were invited to participate in the electronic survey portion of the study. The researcher was pleased to have five elementary schools participate in the survey, with two of these schools participating in the interview phase of the study. In each of the five schools, the principals also participated in the surveys. The two schools that were selected for the interview phase of the study included principal responses as well.

Data Collection Procedures

For the purpose of this study, two types of data collection techniques were selected to allow the researcher to focus on the research problem. The use of quantitative strategies initially, in the form of a survey, was followed by qualitative methods, in the form of one-to-one semi-structured interviews, to understand the problem. This study began with a web based survey in order to sample a larger percentage of the selected population in each school, and then focused the second phase of the study on detailed, open-ended interviews to collect elaborated views from participants in the two selected schools. The interviews were used to deepen and enrich the findings of the survey portion of the study.

Quantitative Process

After permission had been granted to conduct the study, surveys for teachers (Appendix D-1) and principals (Appendix D-2) were distributed to all participating elementary schools. All teachers and the principal of each building were invited to complete the survey. The most common measure of preferences in educational research is through self-reporting questionnaires (McMillan, 2012). Preferences are important in the world of education because they influence a person's motivation and goals.

The survey used predetermined questions to yield statistical data for analysis and explanations. This survey provided a general overview of the teachers' perspectives of collaborative professional development that each individual has experienced in their practice. Participants from the two elementary buildings whose survey responses provided the most divergent perspectives on collaborative professional development teams (i.e. the school with the most favorable responses and the school with the least favorable responses) were then asked to participate in the qualitative phase of the study to gain further insight by probing for additional understanding of the use of collaborative teams as a professional development strategy in these two contexts. By choosing two contexts in which teacher perceptions were markedly different, it was hoped that greater insight into more effective and less effective uses of collaborative professional development teams might be obtained.

Electronic Surveys

The electronic survey began with some general demographic questions regarding each teacher and principal participant and then moved to more specific questions regarding their perceptions of collaborative professional development in their own schools (see

Appendix D-1 and D-2). The teacher surveys contained nineteen questions and the principal surveys contained twenty-two questions. The principal surveys contained an additional question regarding the school demographics and two questions regarding their leadership roles in the establishment of collaborative professional development. The teacher and principal questions were designed to mirror each other to see if there was a correlation between the intentions of professional development in the schools by the principal and the actual perceptions of collaborative professional development from the teachers in that school. The surveys were created through SurveyMonkey® by the researcher and sent to each participating school via an Internet link to the school principal. Principals were also asked to forward the letter of invitation, Appendix C-1, to the teachers along with the survey link.

All survey responses were anonymous, as the researcher did not include questions that would reveal teacher or principal names, school names, or the district name. The anonymity and confidentiality of the surveys was an important part of the study to encourage teachers and principals to respond honestly and without fear of responses being attributed to them or to their supervisors. No distinguishable information about the participants, (ie. teacher or principal name, school name, or district name) was reported by the researcher in the findings.

Qualitative Phase

In the qualitative phase the data were collected through interviews, Appendix E-1 and E-2. Once the survey data had been analyzed, emails were sent to the two selected schools requesting their consent to participate in the interview phase of the study with the researcher. The researcher requested to interview any teachers that were willing to

participate as well as the principals from the elementary school where there were the most favorable survey responses (School Three) and from the school where there were the least favorable survey responses (School One). Neither of the schools knew why they had been invited for the interview phase of the study. Open-ended, general questions were asked of each selected participant. Interviews lasted approximately 50 minutes, with interview audio recordings to assist in capturing all responses. Snowball sampling was also used in each school to invite additional willing teacher participants to be interviewed by the researcher. The interviews with teachers and principals were digitally recorded by the researcher, with the permission of each participant. Interview questions for teachers and principals are attached in Appendix E-1 and Appendix E-2 respectively. The identity of the participants was kept confidential and the data from the surveys and the interviews were sorted and coded by the researcher. The purpose of the interviews was to ensure a robust and authentic data collection process that can only be obtained by immersion in the school environment through an on site visit. The researcher did not reveal the results of the survey to either school during the interviews to ensure that participant responses were as honest and forthright as possible.

The qualitative findings were then used to elaborate and extend the survey findings by examining the differences in the use of collaborative professional development teams within these two contexts.

Interview Process

Interviews conducted in a face-to-face setting can enhance the researcher's ability to cover complex issues (Jobber, 1991; Singleton & Straits in Gubrium & Holstien 2002). Singleton and Straits believe that face-to-face interviews (a) allow for a maximum degree

of probing, (b) yield a higher and more valid response rate than surveys conducted through virtual means, (c) provide flexibility, and (d) allow for clarification of terminology and questions during the interview. Face-to face interviews can add a significant amount of information to the story of the research question. Weick (1995) agrees with the support of story telling in research with the following comment.

If accuracy is nice but not necessary in sense making, then what is necessary?
The answer is, something that preserves plausibility and coherence, something that is reasonable and memorable that embodies past experience and expectations, something that resonates with other people, something that can be constructed retrospectively but can also be used prospectively, something that captures both feeling and thought, something that allows for embellishment to fit current oddities, something that is fun to construct. In short, what is necessary in sense-making is a good story. (p.60)

Interviews in School Three

School number three was the first site visit for the interview phase of the study. Upon arrival to the school, the researcher was greeted by a very welcoming secretary who escorted the researcher to a conference room where the interviews would be conducted. The secretary offered coffee and gave directions to the restroom. The researcher was also supplied with a schedule of interview times and participants that had volunteered for an interview. Previous to the site visit, the building principal forwarded the email invitation provided by the researcher and established a sign up for teachers for the scheduled interview day. Six teachers volunteered to take part in the interviews and the building principal arranged coverage of their classrooms to allow the teachers time to participate.

The principal also agreed to an interview following the teacher interviews. The six teachers that signed up for the interviews all arrived at their scheduled time to be a part of the interview. Teachers willingly agreed to have their interviews recorded by the researcher and were assured that their names and school information would be completely anonymous. Snowballing was also used to see if other teachers would be interested in participating in the interview. Teacher number three recommended a colleague to the researcher and that teacher did agree to an interview. However, the teacher did not have enough time for a full interview due to her teaching schedule that day. Therefore, the researcher did not include all of her comments in the final results with the teachers who completed the entire interview. The teacher did share that she had participated in the survey portion of the study and that she was very happy with all of the collaborative experiences she had been having in this school over the past three years with this principal. She felt that she did have some say in her collaborative groups and even if she did not have a say in every professional development program, she felt that the principal's vision was very strong and that she was learning and growing as a professional under the principal's direction. It appeared that her belief in the vision, direction, and trust in the principal outweighed her having choice in all collaborative professional development groups that she participated in at this school.

Interviews in School One

School One interviews were conducted one week after School Three had completed their interviews. The date and time of these interviews was set at the convenience of the building principal. On the day of the interviews, the researcher arrived early to be sure to locate a parking space in the urban neighborhood. Upon arriving at the school the

researcher rang the door buzzer several times before being buzzed in to the building. Once inside the building lobby, the researcher proceeded to the main office to speak to the secretary. The secretary sat behind a large desk area that had a square cubical around her desk. The lighting was very poor which made the room look very dismal to the new guest to this school. The researcher introduced herself and her purpose for the visit. The secretary did not get out of her seat to greet the researcher and asked if the principal knew that this was taking place today. The researcher assured the secretary that the principal was well aware of the visit and that he should be expecting me. The secretary said that he was in a meeting and directed the researcher to sit outside the office in the lobby to wait.

While waiting in the lobby the researcher noticed that there were many posters hanging on the walls regarding school rules, school events, and PTO events. Several of the posters appeared to be old and were hung at an angle or partly falling off the walls. There were cobwebs on all of the walls and the floor was very dirty. Of the three benches in the lobby, two were in disrepair. While the researcher waited for the principal to finish his meeting, several students arrived late to school with their parents. Each parent that arrived had to ring the doorbell several times before being buzzed inside the building. From what the researcher could see from the lobby, the secretary was not busy with other students or teachers in the office, yet each student who arrived late to school was not immediately addressed by the secretary.

When the principal arrived in the lobby following his meeting, he greeted the researcher and escorted her to his office. The principal interview was scheduled first. Following the principal interview, the principal took the researcher to a conference room that had been reserved for the researcher for the day. To get to the conference room, one

had to walk through the nurse's suite where there were several sick children resting on cots or walk through the Reading Specialist's office where she was giving one-one reading tests. The conference room was completely secluded from the rest of the school and had no easy access to halls or common areas. There was no schedule of teacher interviews provided to the researcher, however the principal had sent the invitation to all teachers to stop in to the conference room during their planning times for an interview if they chose to do so. The researcher was also encouraged to walk through the school and ask teachers to participate in the interview or to sit in the faculty room and recruit participants as well.

The researcher decided to sit in the conference room to see if any teachers would willingly stop in for an interview. After a half hour of waiting no teachers had arrived to participate. The researcher gathered her materials and walked to the faculty room to see if there were any teachers on a break or eating lunch. The faculty room was empty and dark. The researcher decided to sit in the faculty room and wait to see if any teachers would enter for lunch or a planning time and possibly take part in the interview. After twenty minutes of waiting, the researcher decided to walk the halls in search of a willing participant.

The researcher stopped in a primary classroom where a teacher was working quietly at her desk. The researcher introduced herself to the teacher and asked if she would be willing to take part in an interview. The teacher abruptly said no. She was on her planning time and did not have time to participate. The researcher walked down the hall to another classroom and found a young teacher eating lunch at his desk. The teacher immediately invited the researcher inside the room and willingly participated in the

interview. During the interview the teacher invited students to sit quietly in the back of the classroom to work on a computer together during their recess time. The researcher asked the young teacher if he knew of any other teachers that might want to participate and he could not think of anyone. After the first interview was conducted the researcher went back to the faculty room to see if there were teachers who might be interested in an interview, but the room was still empty.

At this point the researcher went back to the reserved conference room and was able to schedule an interview with the Reading Specialist teacher. Following that interview the researcher asked the teacher if she knew of any other teachers that might be willing to participate in the study and she eagerly went out of the conference room to find someone. A few minutes later another teacher arrived to participate in the interview. The third interview participant said it was important to her to participate in the interview because her husband had just completed his doctorate and she knew how hard it was to complete the research phase of the dissertation. In the middle of her interview, another teacher barged in and loudly said, "Well, I am here to do this interview!". The researcher thanked her for coming in and explained that she could only conduct one interview at a time and could she wait until this interview was over. The teacher said, "No, I am busy in fifteen minutes so that is it then." The teacher turned and stormed out of the conference room.

Following the third interview the researcher walked the halls again and checked the lunchroom for additional participants to interview. There were no further teachers available or interested in being interviewed so the researcher thanked the principal for his time and willingness to participate and left the school.

Data Analysis

According to Marshall & Rossman (1999), each phase of data analysis is designed to be reduced into manageable chunks and allow for the interpretation of the data as the researcher formulates meanings and insights from the words and actions of the participants. The first phase of this research employed quantitative methods, allowing for descriptive and inferential numeric analysis. The teacher survey was developed using a five point Likert scale to measure teachers' beliefs and perceptions regarding collaborative professional development. The Likert scale is commonly used in social science studies where participants choose answers in a positive or negative direction. Inferential statistics were used to describe the general responses of the teachers and principals, and a t-Test was employed for research question number five to compare the two means for any significant differences between the two.

Interview audio recordings were transferred to two CD's and transcribed with an Internet based transcription service or ExpresScibe audio transcriber. ExpresScibe is an audio software program that allows the transcriber to control the speed of the audio recording. The use of audio recording allows the researcher to revisit the interview vicariously through playback, again and again (Erikson, 2005). In addition to the audio recording, the researcher took notes pertaining to observations that took place during the interview process. Reflective note taking can "provide an opportunity for the researcher to record personal thoughts, speculation, feelings, ideas, hunches, impressions, and prejudices" (Bogden and Bilken, 1992).

The responses were analyzed and coded, thus allowing the researcher to organize and chunk the interview material (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). This descriptive data were then

analyzed and categorized by the emerging themes that developed from the responses. Common themes were sorted and categorized pertinent to the teacher perspectives of collaborative professional development teams. The combination of audio recordings, transcription, and reflective note taking, provides validity and assists in omitting potential biases, provides anecdotal stories, and allows for common themes to emerge (Maxwell, 2005).

Specifically, each research question was designed to report specific findings through selected types of analysis to assist the researcher in sorting and analyzing all responses. Research question number one was analyzed through survey questions 12-16 (Appendix D-1), by reporting the percentages of respondents for each of the choices on each item. The same type of analysis was used to report findings on research question number two through survey questions 17-19 (Appendix D-1). To answer research question three subgroups of respondents to survey question nine concerning the amount of principal control over the creation of professional development teams were compared in terms of their responses to items that asked about their reactions to professional development experiences. The answer to research question four was obtained in a similar manner. Three subgroups of respondents to survey question ten concerning the amount of principal control in sustaining the work of professional development teams were compared in terms of their responses to items that asked about their reactions to professional development experiences. Research question number five was analyzed by comparing the teacher responses in each school with the responses from the principal in the same school, using percentages of responses in the survey.

For the purpose of this study, the surveys were examined and analyzed prior to the implementation and analysis of the open-ended questionnaires. The integration of the quantitative results and the qualitative findings occurred in the final discussion.

Validity and Reliability

To enhance validity and reliability, the surveys were pilot tested by a group of ten teachers and an administrator prior to the actual survey of teachers. The function of a pilot study is to determine if the survey and interview protocol allow for variances in responses. The pilot survey questions were used to determine the relevance and clarity of the proposed survey to minimize any confusion or lack of clarity in the actual study. The pilot surveys included open-ended questions that teachers felt took too much time to complete. The pilot teachers also felt that teachers may not complete the surveys if they took too much time away from their instructional time. The open-ended questions were deleted from the final surveys. The pilot surveys were not included in the final results of the study.

Interview questions were also piloted by two of the ten teachers and one administrator to determine their relevance and clarity, as well. The interview questions originally had questions regarding student data as it related to collaborative teams. These questions were deleted as well as a question asking if the school was a Title One school. The pilot principal made these suggestions that were accepted by the researcher. A researcher-constructed set of interview questions is required to be pilot tested for accuracy and correctness (Cresswell, 2012).

The use of multiple data sources allowed for triangulation of the data, thus enhancing its validity and reliability. Triangulation is the use of different sources of information

combined to address the same question (McMillan, 2012). In a research study using multiple methods of data collection and analysis, triangulation can strengthen reliability as well as internal validity. Thus, the use of both surveys and interviews helped to strengthen the findings in this study.

Researcher Perspective

The researcher had an unusual perspective of School One and School Three prior to the beginning of the study. When the researcher began her career in public education thirty years ago, she taught Kindergarten at these two schools as a traveling teacher. At that time, School One was considered to be more of a suburban school while still within the city limits. School Three was still very much an inner city school with a high mobility rate. The researcher only worked in these two schools for one year and then took a first grade teaching position in one of the other thirteen elementary schools. At that school she had the opportunity to work as a fellow elementary teacher with the principal of School One. She was delighted to meet him again during the interview phase of the study. It should also be mentioned that the researcher believed that teachers would perceive collaborative work negatively when they knew principals had control of the groups. The results of the study were a surprise to the researcher.

Summary

Chapter 3 contains a summary of the methodology used examine elementary teachers' and principals' perceptions of collaborative professional development teams. In addition, the process for obtaining this information from teachers and principals of the participating schools is summarized, as well as how the data was analyzed. Key findings from the research will be shared with all responding schools and administrations.

Additionally, all implications for future professional development practices, as well as deficits of the research will be shared with the participants of this study.

Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this study was to examine elementary teachers' perceptions of collaborative professional development teams. Understanding collaborative practices from the teacher's perspective may provide insight to administrators when creating professional development opportunities for teachers. As explained in detail in chapter 3, information was gathered by surveying teachers and principals from five elementary schools in a large urban school district. Following the surveys, interviews were conducted in two of the five schools based on the results of the survey data.

Participant Demographic Information of all Five Schools

There were a total of ninety-five teachers and five principals that participated in the survey phase of the study. Eighteen of the teachers were male and seventy-seven teachers were female. Of the five principals in the study, only one was male. Teacher demographic information is described in the figures below.

Teacher's total number of years experience is listed in the Figure 4.1 below.

Figure 4.1: Years of Teaching

Total Years of Teaching		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Count
0-5	22.1%	21
6-10	27.4%	26
11-15	12.6%	12
16-20	7.4%	7
20+	30.5%	29
Total	100%	95

Teacher age in all five schools is noted in Figure 4.2 below.

Figure 4.2: Participant Ages

Ages		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Count
Less than 25	2.1%	2
25 to 35	44.2%	42
36 to 45	23.2%	22
46 to 55	15.8%	15
56 to 65	13.7%	13
More than 66	1.1%	1
Total	100%	95

Teacher's highest level of education is noted in figure number 4.3 below.

Figure 4.3: Level of Education

Highest Level of Education		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Count
Bachelors Degree	30.5%	29
Masters Degree	69.5%	66
Doctoral Degree	0.0%	0
Total	100%	95

Information regarding teaching assignments is noted in figure 4.4 below.

Figure 4.4: Teaching Assignments

Grade Level		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Count
Pre K-K	12.6%	12
1 - 2	15.8%	15
3 - 4	20.0%	19
5 - 6	9.5%	9
Special Area	42.1%	40
Total	100%	95

Participant response rate by building is as follows:

School One: 8 total responses - 3 classroom teachers and 5 special area teachers, School

Two: 14 total responses - 10 classroom teachers and 4 special area teachers, School

Three: 25 total responses - 16 classroom teachers and 9 special area teachers, School

Seven: 24 total responses - 12 classroom teachers and 12 special area teachers, School

Eight: 24 total responses - 14 classroom teachers and 10 special area teachers.

All of the above demographic information is important to give the reader insight into the range of characteristics of the participants in this study. The demographic information had no bearing on the outcome of the research questions but should be used instead as a lens through which to view the wide variety of participants involved in this study with regard to their years of teaching, age, level of higher education, and teaching assignments at the elementary level.

Profile of School One and School Three

The table below describes the specific demographics of School One and School Three. This information is important for the reader to be able to look closely at the similarities and differences of these two schools.

Table 4.1: School One and School Three Demographics

Demographics	School 1	School 3
Total Number of Students	400	452
Ethnicity:		
Latino	62%	61%
African American	18%	16%
White	9%	11%
Asian	5%	6%
Multi-racial	6%	6%
Attendance Area	Urban	Urban (Inner city)
Grade Configuration:		
Pre-Kindergarten Class	1	1
K-5	three K5, 1, 2, two 3, 4, 5	3 each grade
Emotional Support Class	1	1

Total Number of Teachers	28	32
Special Area Teachers:		
ESL	3	4
Art	1	1
Music	1	1
Physical Education	1	1
Learning Support	2	2
Guidance Counselor	1	1
Instructional Coach	1	1
Exceptional Student Specialist	1	1
Support Staff	12	14
Title One	Yes (School Wide)	Yes (School Wide)
Free and Reduced Lunch	All Students (83%) Economically Disadvantaged	All Students (90%) Economically Disadvantaged
Mobility Rate	30% annually	45% annually

These two schools were selected for the face-to-face interviews because their survey data varied the most of all five schools that participated in the study. It should also be noted that all schools were purposefully chosen from the same school district to keep the context similar throughout the study. Any differences, therefore, would most likely be discovered at the school level itself, rather than due to differences in district systems.

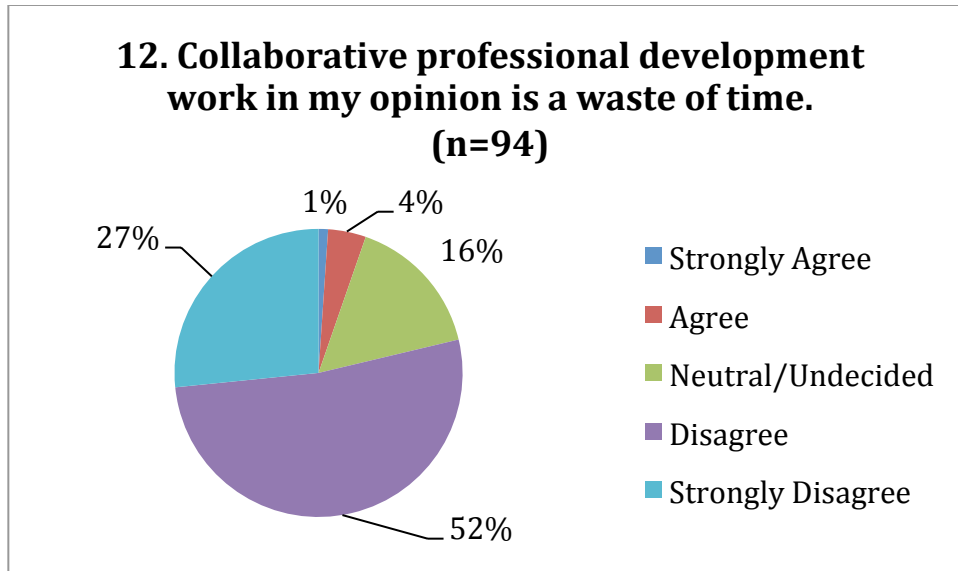
Research Question Number One

1. To what extent do elementary teachers view working in collaborative professional development teams as a mechanism for promoting teacher growth?

Research question number one was analyzed through survey questions 12-15 (Appendix D-1), by reporting the percentages of respondents for each of the choices on each item. Each survey question has a specific figure that explains the summary of the participant responses.

The summary of responses to survey question number twelve is listed in Figure 4.5 below.

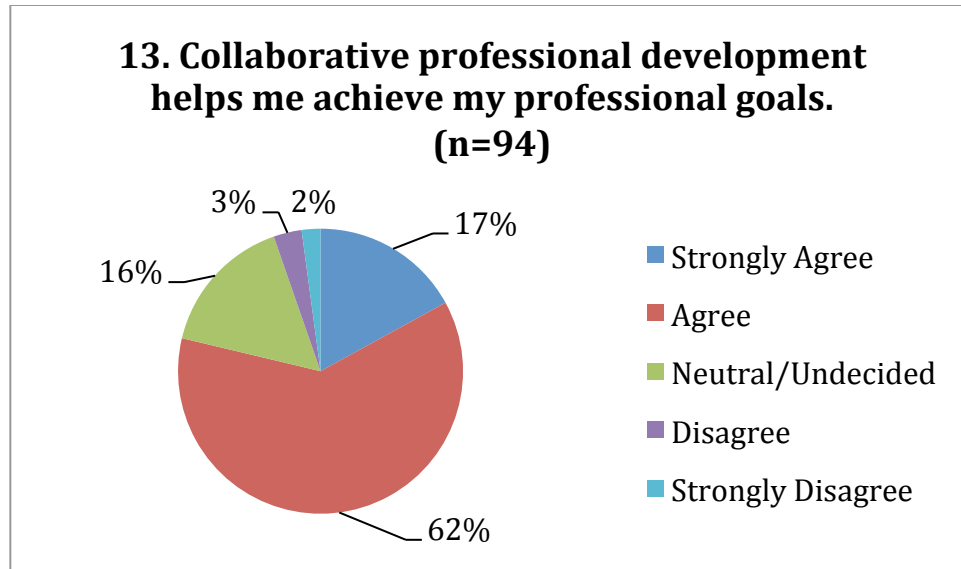
Figure 4.5: Survey Question 12



Seventy nine percent of the teacher participants responded favorably to the notion of collaborative professional development overall. Only five percent of the total responses were negative toward collaborative professional development, while sixteen percent of the participants selected a neutral response to this question.

Question number thirteen asked teachers if they believed that collaborative professional development helped them to achieve their professional goals. Figure 4.6 presents a summary of the total teacher responses for this question.

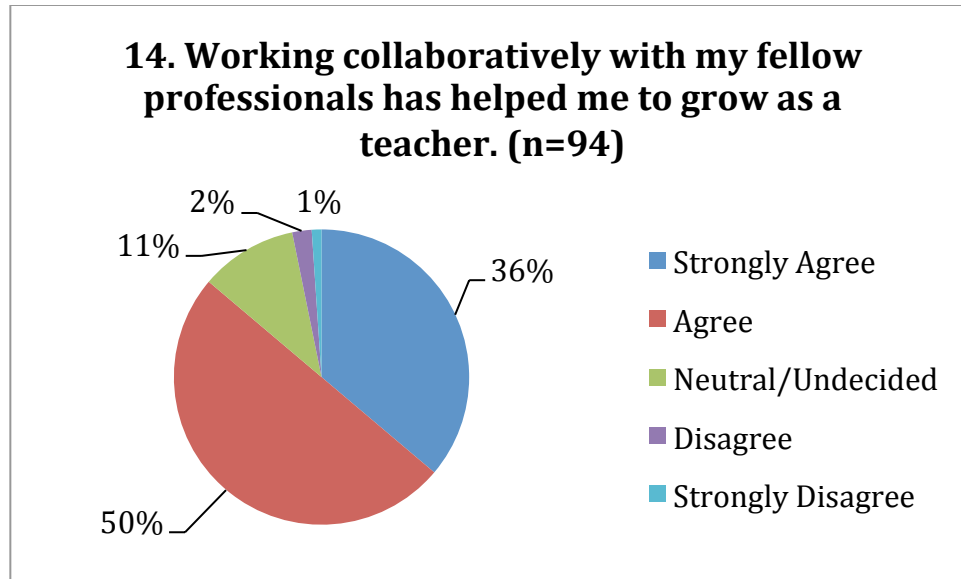
Figure 4.6: Survey Question 13



Seventy nine percent of teachers feel that collaborative professional development helps them to achieve their professional goals. As was the case in survey question number twelve, only five percent of the total responses were negative toward collaborative professional development helping them to achieve their professional goals, while sixteen percent of the participants selected a neutral response to this question.

Question number fourteen asked teachers if they believed that working collaboratively with their peers helped them to grow as a teacher. Figure 4.7 shows the total responses below.

Figure 4.7: Survey Question 14



The positive responses to this question showed that eighty six percent of the teachers felt that working with their fellow teachers has helped them to grow as a teacher. It is also important to note that thirty six percent of teachers strongly agreed that working collaboratively with fellow teachers has helped them to grow as professionals. This is the highest total in the strongly agree category in the entire survey. Only three percent of the teachers did not feel that working with their peers helped them to grow as a teacher, while eleven percent of the teachers were neutral in their responses.

In addition to the survey responses, interview responses from School One (the least favorable school) and School Three (the most favorable school) have yielded important insights regarding what teachers see as the most useful aspects of collaborative professional development. Teacher responses in the least favorable school focused on the benefits for new teachers and for students as well as the importance of risk-taking. “For me as a younger teacher, hearing what works with the older teachers helps. This year I have been showing the substitute what to do and how it works. We don’t often get time to

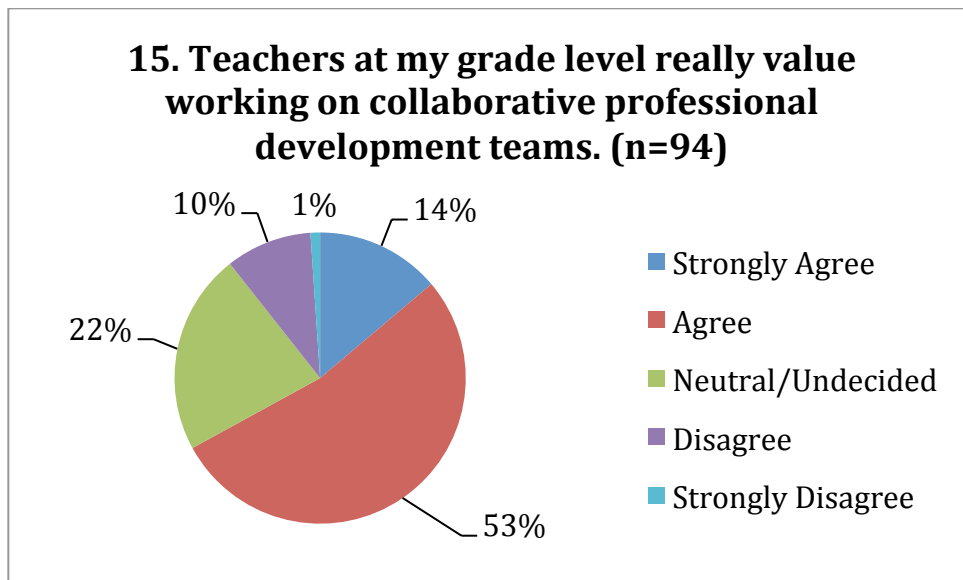
share so the vertical planning times this year have helped me.” (Teacher1 School 1). “If it is a safe environment you can bring what you want to the table and take risks and feel safe. Professional growth happens.” (Teacher 2 School 1). “For my ESL students they have to make connections so collaborating is important. We have to make those connections for our ESL kids. Repeated exposure with language is important.” (Teacher 3 School 1).

In School Three many teachers shared stories of the positive benefits of working collaboratively with peers. “Being able to bounce ideas off of each other. I get stuck by myself. Sharing what works and doesn’t work. I also like peer observations and open conversations.” (Teacher 1 school 3). This concept, of getting stuck when working alone was also shared by another teacher in School Three. Having the opportunity to share and generate new ideas is valued here. Another teacher reports this: “ You learn other ways when everyone comes together to make a plan. When you share and have input in it is more productive than having someone telling you what to do.” (Teacher 2 School 3). Teachers in this school have many opportunities for vertical team collaboration when planning and value the experiences. “The other perspectives are great. It takes you out of your little world.” (Teacher 3 school 3). Another teacher talked about the idea of time to reflect purposefully with colleagues. When teachers have a clear sense of purpose and the vision, they are able to delve into the work in a meaningful way. When teachers see that their efforts are directly connected to student improvement they feel motivated to continue the work. “The more collaboration we have, the more integrated things are for our kids. The kids get so much more out of the work when we integrate. Growing as learners and as teachers has been great.” (Teacher 5 School 3).

Overall, teachers from both buildings had positive stories to share regarding a collaborative experience that they had been involved in. Teachers in School One, noted that the collaborative environment needs to be safe in order for it to be effective and focused. Having consistent time for meeting was also a factor that made for positive experiences for teachers in both schools, as well as the opportunity to meet in vertical teams. Sharing ideas, opinions, and thinking as a team were common themes for positive collaborative experiences.

Survey question number fifteen asked teachers if they felt their peers valued working in collaborative teams. Figure 4.8 shows the total teacher response.

Figure 4.8: Survey Question 15



The favorable responses to this question were somewhat lower, perhaps due to the fact that respondents had to assume they knew what their fellow teachers perceptions were rather than responding to questions that were directly related to their own thoughts and feelings. It could also be that teachers sense that their colleagues feel less positive than they do regarding collaboration. The responses to this question showed that teachers felt

that sixty seven percent of their peers valued collaborative professional development at their grade level while eleven percent felt their team members did not value collaboration. Twenty two percent of the teachers responded neutrally to this question, which could mean that the respondents were unsure of the perceptions of their peers regarding collaborative teams.

In summary, teachers view collaborative professional development as a mechanism for promoting teacher growth when there are purposeful structures and adequate time for collaboration. They also recognize the importance of having opportunities to share in vertical teams as these experiences helped them to see beyond the four walls of their own classrooms. Purposeful reflecting, sharing of ideas and opinions, in a safe environment, were common themes for positive collaborative experiences.

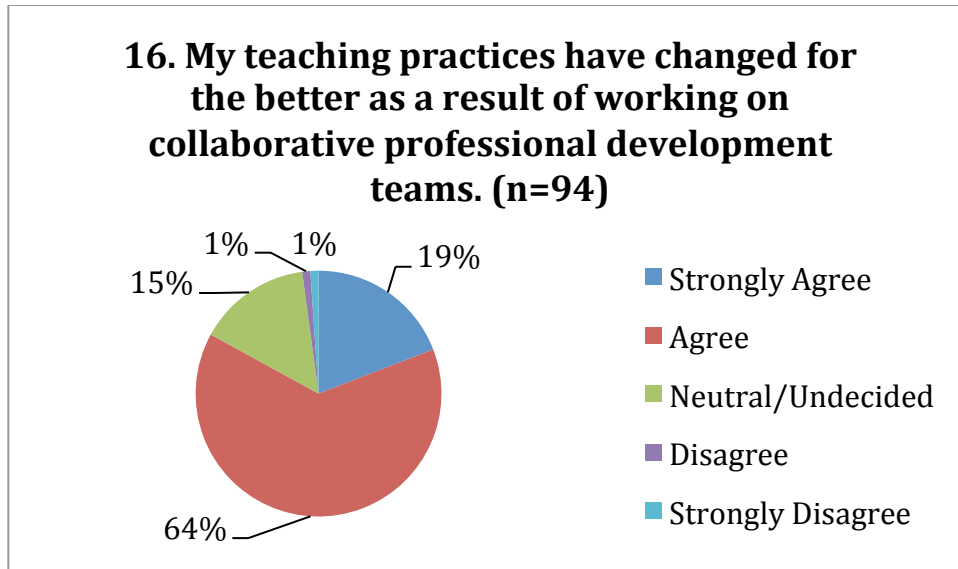
Research Question Number Two

2. Do elementary teachers believe that their involvement in collaborative professional development teams has improved their practice?

Research question number two was analyzed through survey questions 16-19 (Appendix D-1), by reporting the percentages of respondents for each of the choices on the survey questions. Each question has a specific graph that explains the summary of the total teacher responses.

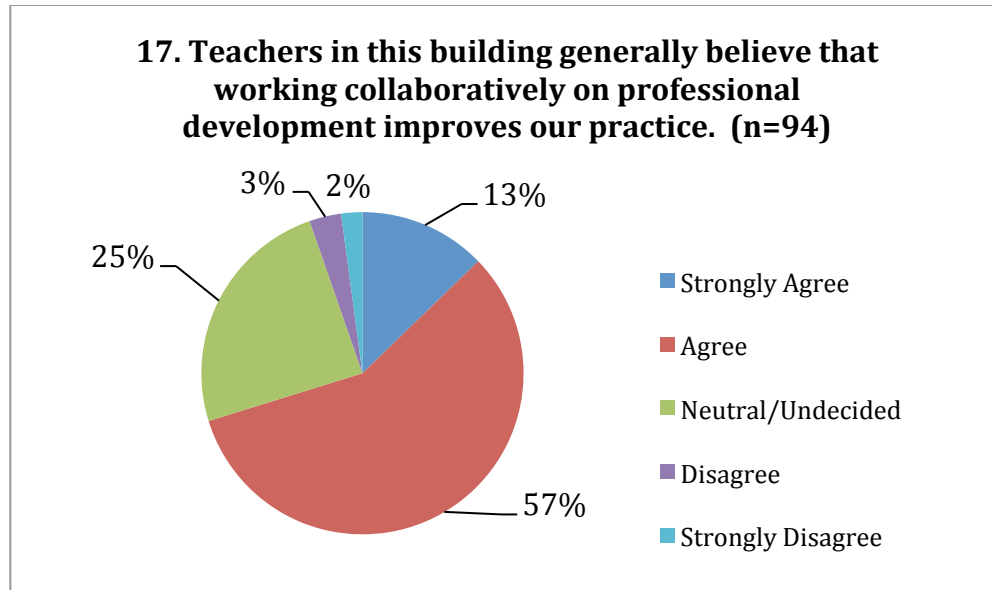
Survey question number sixteen shows that eighty three percent of the teachers felt that their teaching practices have changed for the better as a result of working on collaborative professional teams. Only two percent of the total respondents felt that their teaching practices did not change for the better, however fifteen percent of the total responses were neutral. These results are shown in figure 4.9 below.

Figure 4.9: Survey Question 16



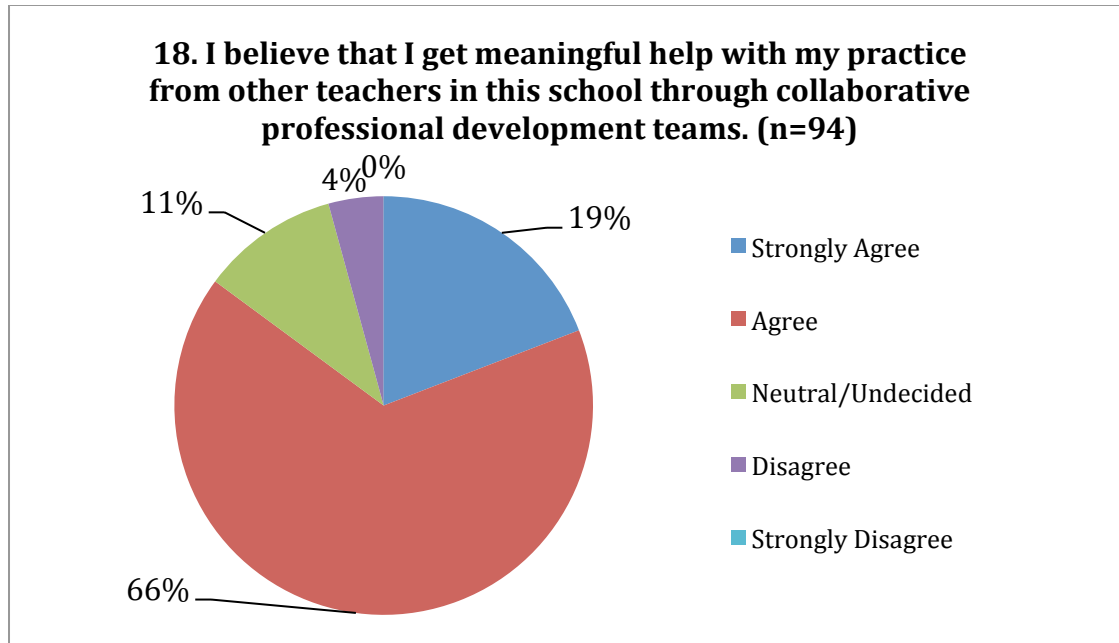
Survey question number seventeen asked teachers to think about how other teachers perceive working in collaborative groups. As seen in figure 4.10 below, the responses indicate that seventy percent of teachers generally believe that working collaboratively on professional development improves their practice. Only five percent of the teachers disagree with this positive view. However, twenty five percent of teachers responded neutrally to this question. This could mean that teachers were unsure of their colleagues perceptions of collaborative work or that they were unwilling to make a prediction about how other professionals view working in collaborative professional development teams as a mechanism for promoting teacher growth.

Figure 4.10: Survey Question 17



Survey question number eighteen asked teachers how they perceive their own growth through collaborative professional development teams. As seen in figure 4.11 below, eighty five percent of all teachers feel that they get meaningful help with their practice as a result of working on collaborative teams. Only eleven percent of teachers responded neutrally toward this question and a minimal four percent of teachers felt negatively regarding collaborative teams.

Figure 4.11: Survey Question 18



Interview question number six asked a similar question of participants in School One and School Three. Teachers were asked to share a story about a situation in which collaborative professional development worked really well for them. A teacher in School One reported the following: “In my first year of teaching, we had a consistent schedule. Every Thursday we met to plan each week. That allotted and consistent time made a difference for me.” Another teacher from School One reported a story from her beginning years of teaching, many years ago in this school. “I taught a split age classroom. We were involved with the Writing Project from Teacher’s College. We worked as a team. We shared ideas, not just lessons. You got to see the benefits for the students.” And one other teacher in the same school shared a story of a positive collaborative experience that she had as a co-teacher the previous year. None of the teachers in School One were able to share a successful collaborative experience from this current school year. It appears that the newly developed professional development time in this school, mornings from 8:00 to

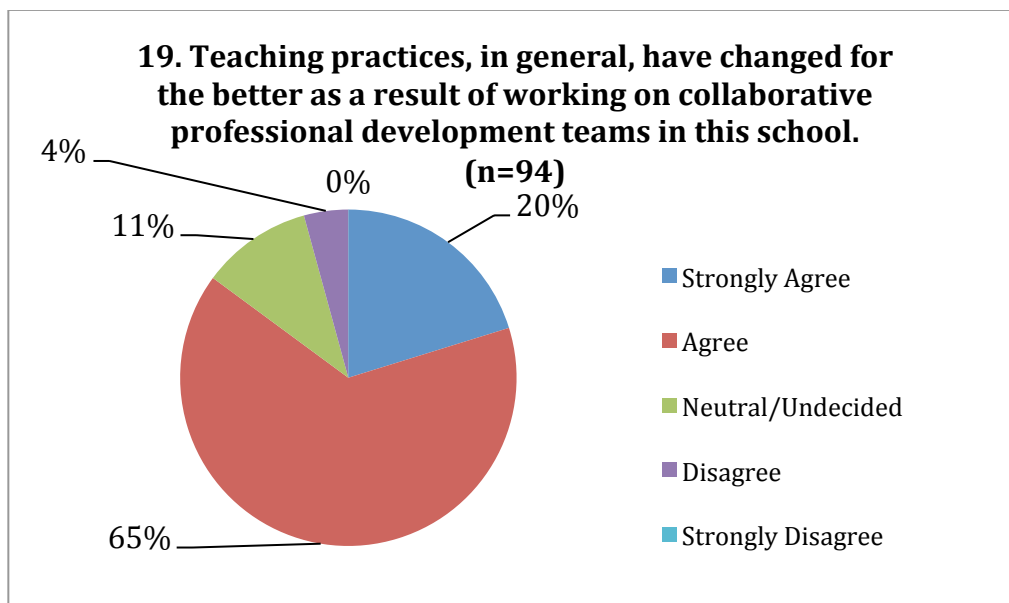
8:30, was viewed negatively by the teachers that were interviewed. The experiences that they shared were not perceived as collaborative, nor a productive use of their time.

Teachers in School Three shared many stories about situations in which collaborative professional development worked really well for them. Trust and choice were common themes among this staff. “We got to pick whom we worked with and focus on developing our own needs.” (Teacher 1 School 3). Another teacher shared how working in collaborative teams helped them to solve problems of practice together which in turn helped them to integrate writing across all content areas as a result. They saw the benefits of their collaborative efforts in the work that the children produced. Two teachers shared the same experience of being involved in a math committee of their choice. “With the math committee, we planned math professional development for our staff. It went really well. We all wanted to be there and we all worked well together. The personalities were great. Then we presented for our building and it went really well. Then they asked us to present for the district level. It was great.” Other teachers talked about having a sounding board and having ongoing feedback on their work as a benefit of collaboration. “Teachers who want to collaborate, find the time for it.” (Teacher 4 School 3).

Overall, teachers in School Three valued the many opportunities for collaboration with fellow teachers. The theme of trust in team members and choice in collaborative groups was consistent with all respondents. Teachers also felt a sense of accomplishment in their collaborative efforts. When teachers saw growth in student work and when they shared meaningful experiences with other teachers, they became excited about their collaborative work and looked forward to other similar experiences in the future. They were more willing to take risks in sharing with peers because of their combined successes.

Figure 4.12 below shows the results of survey question number nineteen. This question asked teachers to make a judgment regarding how they perceive teaching practices in their school as a result of working on collaborative professional development teams. The results here are almost identical to those in figure 4.11 with one percentage point higher in the strongly agree range. The results of those that feel teaching practices, in general, have changed for the better are exactly as reported in figure 4.11. Eighty five percent of all teachers feel that teaching practices have changed for the better in their school as a result of working on collaborative teams. Only eleven percent of teachers responded neutrally toward this question and a minimal four percent of teachers felt negatively regarding teacher growth as a result of working in collaborative teams.

Figure 4.12: Survey Question 19



In summary, most teachers believe that their involvement in collaborative development teams improves their practice when they have some choice in team members and choice in topic focus. Likewise, trust in colleagues was a major factor in the perceived success of the collaborative experience. However, all teachers seemed to

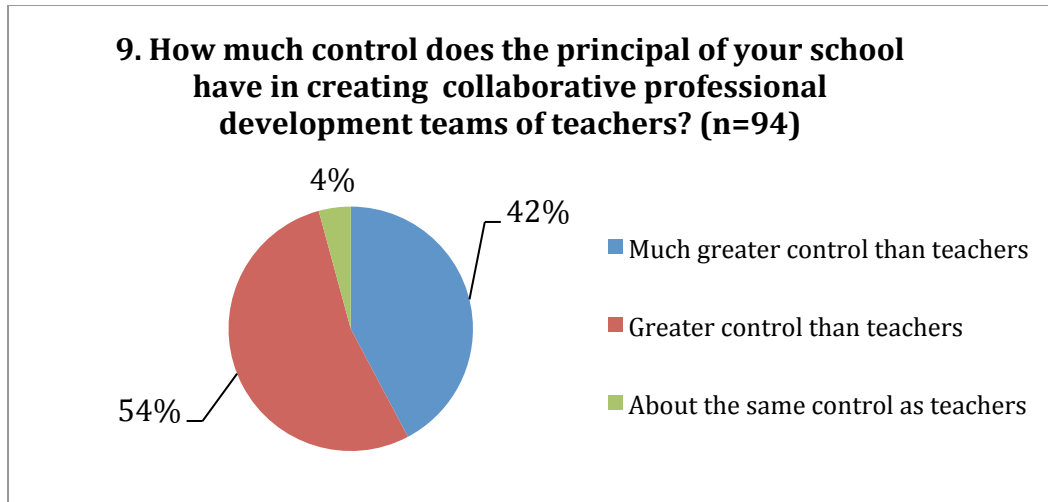
value vertical team experiences and sharing, even if they did not have choice in those team configurations. Teachers became excited about their experiences when they saw student work improving as a result of their collaborative efforts and when they were able to make a positive contribution to others in their professional growth. In School Three, success seemed to breed more success and a greater willingness to take risks with new collegial collaborative groups. Teachers who repeatedly had negative experiences with collaborative groups felt frustrated by the negative spirit of other professionals and yearned for more positive experiences in the future.

Research Question Number Three

3. Does the perceived role of the elementary administrator in creating collaborative professional development teams impact teacher perceptions concerning the potential of those teams to impact their practice?

The analysis for research question three began with tabulating teacher responses to survey question nine which inquired about teacher perceptions regarding the principal's control over the creation of collaborative professional development in their schools. No respondents indicated that the principal had less control than teachers or much less control than teachers. Thus, all respondents fell into three distinct groups: those who perceived the principal control to have much greater control than teachers, those who perceived the principal as exerting greater control than teachers, and those who perceived the principal to have about the same amount of control as teachers. Figure 4.13 reveals these findings in percentage of total teacher responses from all five schools.

Figure 4.13: Survey Question 9



The second step in answering research question three was to compare the responses of those three groups (from item 9) to their responses to items 11 through 19, which asked about teacher's perceptions of the impact and value of collaborative professional development teams.

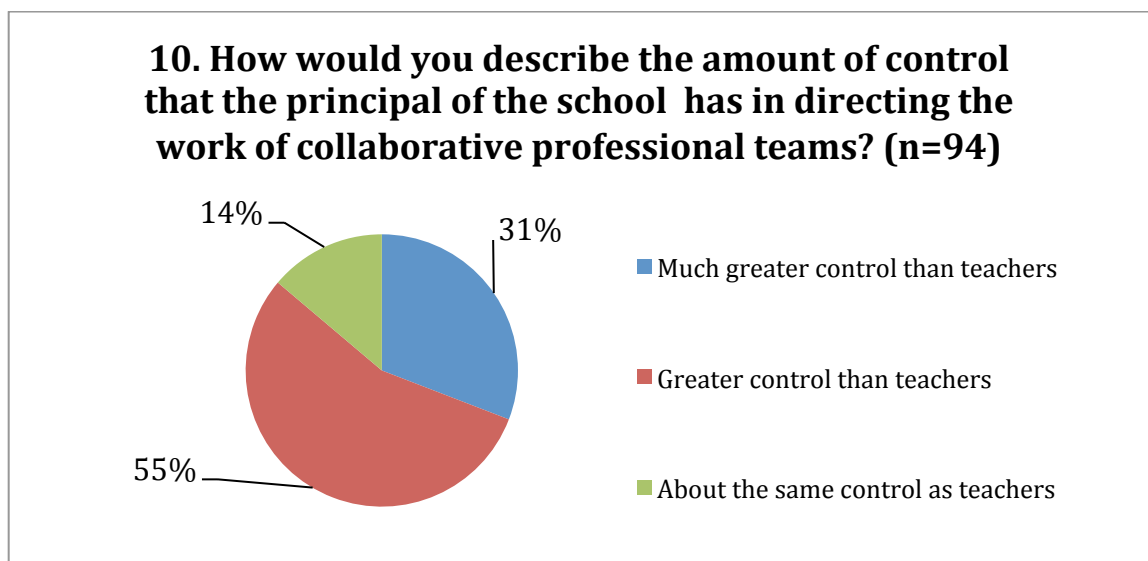
Therefore, when analyzing teachers' perceptions of the amount of control the principal has in creating collaborative professional teams, there seems to be common perceptions that principals have greater control than teachers, but this does not seem to negatively impact teachers' perceptions of the positive impact on their practice. Over all, teachers believe that their personal practice and the practice of their colleagues has improved by being a part of collaborative experiences.

Research Question Number Four

4. Does the perceived amount of control that the principal exerts in sustaining the work of collaborative professional development teams influence teacher perceptions of the value of those teams?

The analysis for research question four began with tabulating teacher responses to survey question 10 which inquired about teacher perceptions regarding the principal's control in directing the work of collaborative professional development teams in their schools. In a similar vein to survey question 9 respondents fell into three distinct groups: those who perceived the principal to have much greater control than teachers, those who perceived the principal as exerting greater control than teachers, and those who perceived the principal to have about the same amount of control as teachers. Though in contrast to responses to question 9, one teacher responded to question 10 indicating that the principal had less control than teachers in directing the work of professional development teams. Figure 4.14 reveals these findings in percentage of total teacher responses from all five schools as seen below.

Figure 4.14: Survey Question 10



The second step in answering research question four was to compare the responses of those three groups (from item 10) in terms of their responses to items 11 through 19,

which asked about teacher's perceptions of the impact and value of collaborative professional development teams.

As explained in the interpretation of research question three, teachers' responses to all of the items, 11 through 19 were generally quite positive. Thus, it is clear that teachers who perceived the principal as having far greater control than teachers in directing professional development teams did not have substantially more negative opinions about the value or impact of collaborative professional development teams than those who saw the principal as simply having more control than teachers.

Overall, teacher responses indicate that they value collaborative professional development teams even though they perceive they have little control of the work that the team is expected to complete. While teachers may expect the principals to have greater control, there may be some limits on how much more greater control a principal can exert before it makes a significant difference in the overall perceptions of collaborative work between colleagues. Teachers in this study reported that they valued the assigned grouping of the collaborative teams as long as they could connect it to a school vision or school goal. When teachers felt that their work was purposeful and focused on school goals they were more willing to work in any team configurations that they were assigned to. Many teachers expressed the importance of the vertical team experience that helped them to see things from a new perspective, which in turn has helped them to grow professionally.

Research Question Number Five

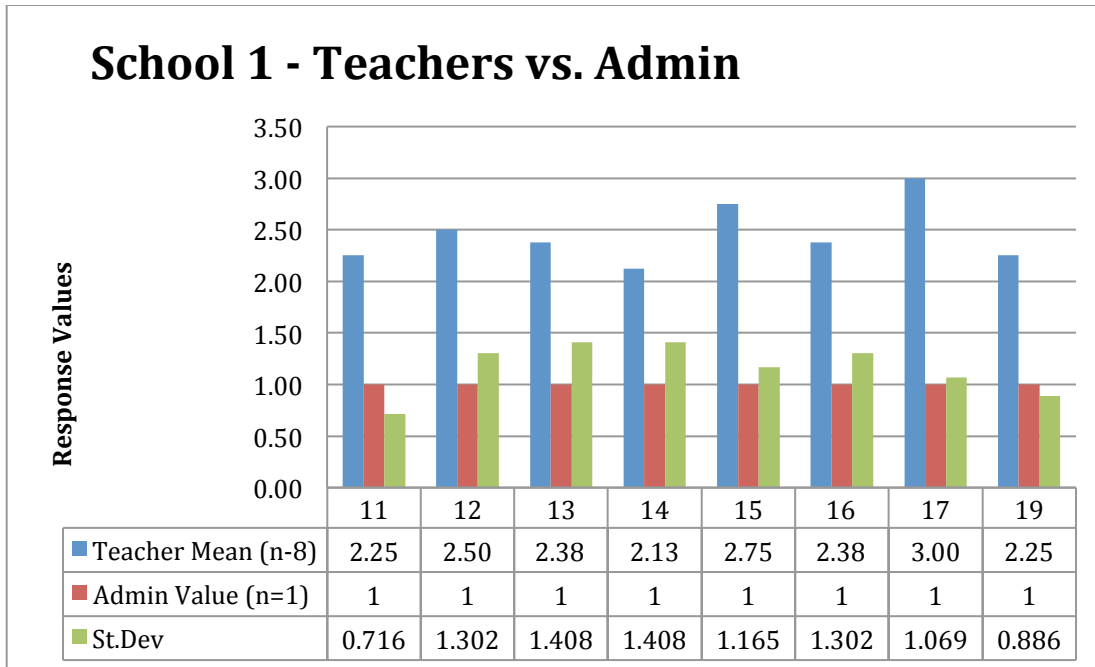
5. How do the perceptions of elementary teachers concerning collaborative professional teams compare with the perceptions of elementary school principals?

Research question number five was analyzed by comparing the teacher responses to questions 11 through 19 in each school with the responses from the principal in the same school. The five schools in this study have been identified by their school survey number only: School One, School Two, School Three, School Seven, and School Eight. The schools are listed in order of the surveys that were originally sent out to the schools. Schools Four, Five and Six were invited to participate in the survey, however, in the end they did not choose to participate in the study. Schools One, Two, Three, Seven, and Eight are represented in the following discussion. Finally, teacher interview data from questions ten and eleven were used to provide additional information to answer research question number five.

A descriptive statistical analysis of the teacher and principal means is portrayed in the tables below. The mean (the arithmetic average of a distribution of scores) and standard deviations of all teacher responses in each of the five schools is compared to the principal's response on each of the items.

School One's data are provided in Figure 4.15 below. Research questions 11-19 are depicted in the figure. Each research question in the figure is analyzed following the figure. A response of one to these items indicates strongly agree while a response of five indicates strongly disagree.

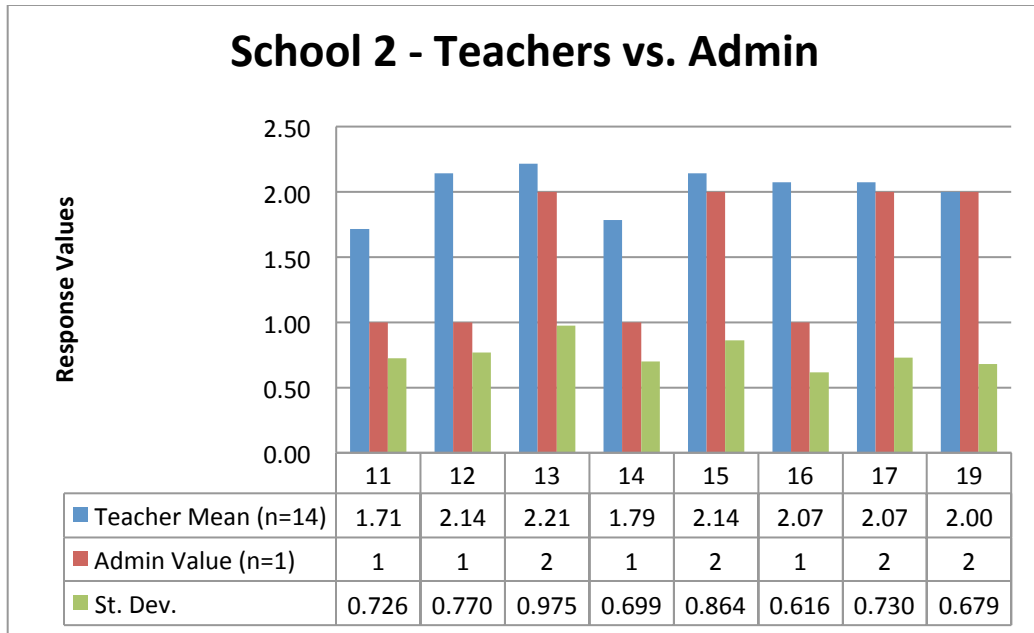
Figure 4.15: School One



For each of the eight items, the response of the principal is more positive than the mean response of the teacher group. Thus, the principal sees the impact and value of collaborative professional development teams even more positively than do the teachers whose responses are uniformly positive. It is also interesting to note that the standard deviations for the teacher responses on most of the items are considerably large, varying by more than one responses choice. School One data indicated the greatest differences in teacher perceptions when compared to the building principal perceptions in all five of the participating schools.

School Two's data are provided in Figure 4.16 below. Research questions 11-19 are depicted in the figure. Each research question in the figure is analyzed following the figure.

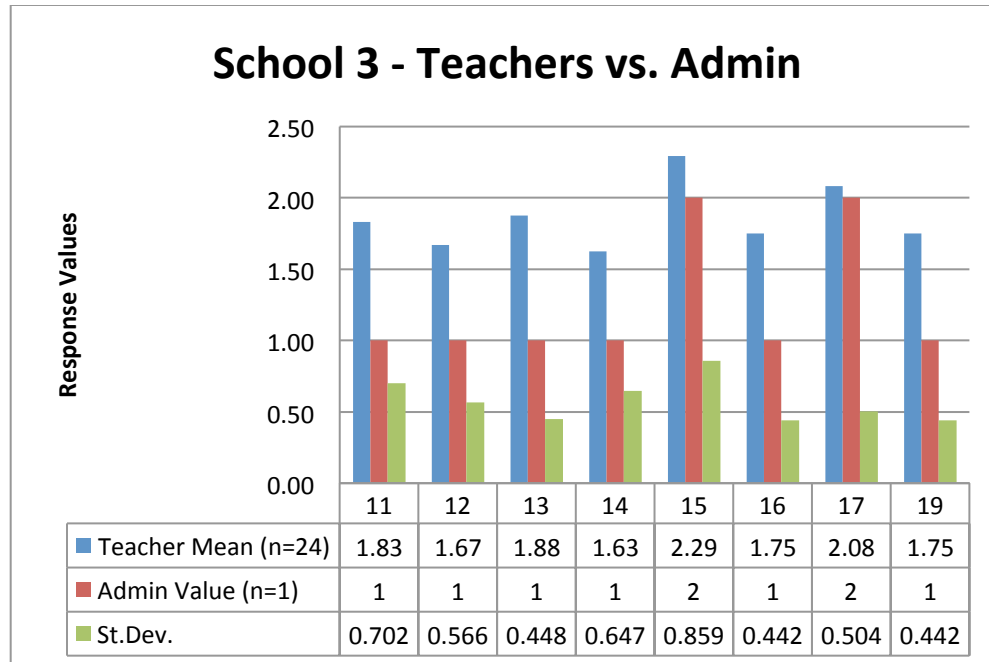
Figure 4.16: School Two



Although the mean responses of the teacher group are closer to the principal's responses than was the case in School One, it is still true that the principal's responses in School Two were always more positive than the teachers' except for item 19 where the responses are equal. The standard deviations for the teacher group are smaller in School Two than in School One except for question eleven, which has a very slight difference.

School Three's data are provided in Figure 4.17 below. Research questions 11-17 and 19 are depicted in the figure. Each research question in the figure is analyzed following the figure.

Figure 4.17: School Three



Overall, School Three had the lowest standard deviations of all five schools indicating that the teachers as a group in this school have more similar perceptions toward collaborative professional development than teachers in the other schools. Teachers and the principal report that when the work is tied to the overall goals of the school, there is trust in the group, teacher choice, and adequate time for collaboration to occur, positive perceptions are held by all.

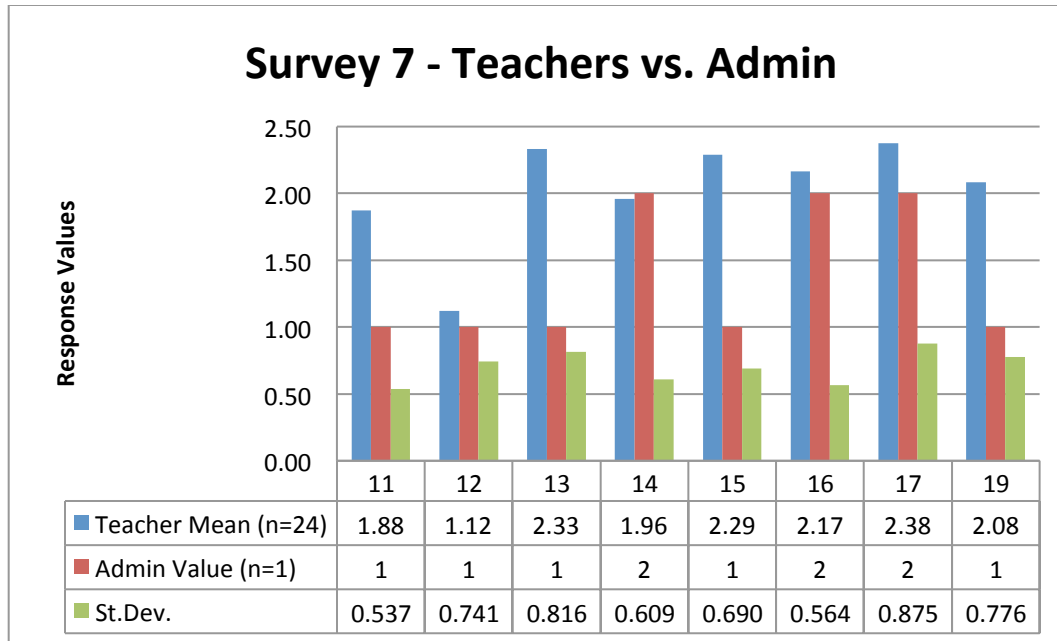
Interview responses also give insights to teachers' perceptions regarding collaborative teams in their school and verify the survey data. When teachers from School Three were asked to respond to the question, "*Can you talk about what you see as this school's primary goals?*" each teacher was able to share the exact school goals, Common Core and their new Math program. A few teachers added goals that related to the specific curriculum committee that they were working on as it related to the other building goals.

The teachers gave in depth information about the school goals and sounded confident about these goals as they spoke.

All teachers in School Three also had similar responses from to interview question 11 from School Three: *“Do you feel that your professional development opportunities are aligned with the annual goals of the school?”* They all stated that their professional development goals were aligned with the annual goals of the school and all of their work was focused because the principal planned it that way. One teacher said this, “Yes. Everything we do is exactly what we need to be working on.” Another teacher stated, “Yes. It is all connected to what we are doing. It all goes back to our School Improvement Plan.” Overall, the teacher and principal responses in School Three are much more alike than in any of the other four schools that participated in the study.

Data from School Seven are provided in Figure 4.18 below. Research questions 11-19 are depicted in the figure. Each research question in the figure is analyzed following the figure.

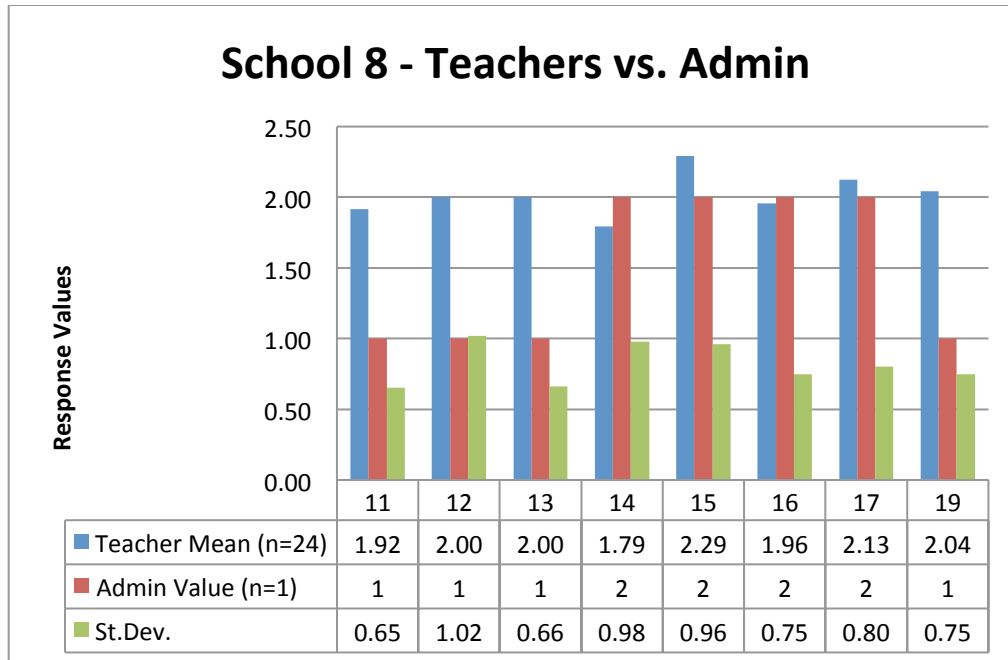
Figure 4.18: School Seven



School Seven's data also had very positive responses from both the teacher and principal. It is interesting to point out that the standard deviation is lower in response to questions 11, 14, and 15, when compared to School Three and the other four schools. These three questions focus on collaborative growth and work with grade level peers. It could be that this building focuses most of its collaborative work on grade level teams rather than on vertical team work. It is interesting to note that the teachers' mean response to item 14 was more positive than the principal's response.

School Eight's data are provided in Figure 4.19 below. Research questions 11-19 are depicted in the figure. Each research question in the figure is analyzed following the figure.

Figure 4.19: School Eight



Although the mean responses of the teacher group are closer to the principal's responses than was the case in School One, the principal's responses in School Eight were more positive than the teachers' except for question 14 and 16. The standard deviations for the teacher group are smaller in School Eight than in School One, but not as low as in School Three. The responses from both teachers and principal are positive toward collaborative professional development in School Eight, yet not as positive as in School Three.

Overall, all five schools showed positive perceptions toward collaborative teams as a means for professional development regardless of the principals control in establishing the groups or in setting the direction for the groups. Although it was not the case on every item in every school, principals in all five buildings were more positive overall than the teacher average. Teachers who felt their work was connected to student improvement, had a clear focus for the collaborative work, and believed that their work was connected

to the school goals had a more positive view. School One data indicates that the teachers' and principals' views are the furthest apart while the teachers and principal in School Three were more similar and more positive toward collaborative teams in their school.

School One and School Three Demographic Comparison

This final section of data analysis focuses on the comparison of School One and School Three. It is intended to portray how these two schools are similar and how they are different in regards to teacher and principal perceptions of collaborative teams as a means for professional development. This section will look at demographic data, survey questions 11-19, and interview responses from both teachers and principals. It is important to keep in mind while interpreting these data that the number of teacher respondents differ greatly in the two schools (8 vs 25) and that the roles of the respondents also differed, i.e. general classroom teachers vs specialists. Both general classroom teachers and specialists are part of the professional development team process.

Demographic Data School One and School Three

Question 1: Please indicate the total number of years you have been teaching

Figure 4.20: School One and School Three Years of Teaching

1. Please indicate the total number of years you have been teaching		
Answer Options	School One	School Three
0-5	25.0%	20.0%
6-10	25.0%	28.0%
11-15	25.0%	4.0%
16-20	0.0%	12.0%
20 +	25.0%	36.0%

Perhaps the biggest differences in total years of teaching are that 25% of the teachers in School One have more than 16 years experience while 48% of the teachers in School Three have more than 16 years experience. The principals also had a slight difference in

the number of years in their role. Principal One has 6-10 years of experience as a principal, while Principal Three has 0-5 years of experience in this role.

The biggest discrepancy is the number of teachers who participated with School One having 8 teachers participate and School Three having 25 teachers participate. It is possible that the years of experience may actually be more similar in each school, had there been more participants from School One. It is important to note the small number of respondents in School One when interpreting the data.

Question 2: What is your gender?

Figure 4.21: School One and School Three Gender

2. What is your gender?		
Answer Options	School One	School Three
Male	12.5%	8.0%
Female	87.5%	92.0%

In looking at this data comparison (Figure 4.23) between the two schools, there is no real difference in gender. These numbers may be skewed due to the small sample size in School One. It should be noted that the principal in School One is male and the principal in School Three is female.

Question 3: What is your age?

Figure 4.22: School One and School Three Teacher Age

3. What is your age?		
Answer Options	School One	School Three
Less than 25	0.0%	0.0%
25 to 35	25.0%	48.0%
36 to 45	25.0%	16.0%
46 to 55	25.0%	20.0%
56 to 65	12.5%	16.0%
More than 66	12.5%	0.0%

Figure 4.22 depicts the data in response to the demographic question regarding age. Neither school had a teacher who was under the age of 25. However, 25% of School One participants were 56 and older, while only 16% of teachers in School Three were in the same age category. The majority of the teacher participants from School Three were in the 25 to 35, age range. It is possible that School One teacher ages may actually be more similar to those indicated in School Three, but the low response rate of School One makes this unclear. There is no evidence that age is a factor in either school.

Principal One is in the age range of 46-55 years and Principal Three is in the age range of 36-45.

Question 4: What is your highest level of education?

In response to the demographic question regarding highest level of education, there were no real differences between teachers in School One as compared to School Three. Principal One has a Masters Degree while Principal Three has a Doctoral Degree. The degree difference in the administrators was the only notable difference in the level of education between the two schools. There is no evidence that level of education is a factor in this study.

Question 5: What grade level do you teach?

When looking at the teaching areas of the respondents, it is important to point out that only 37.5% of the teachers from School One were classroom teachers and 62.5% of the teacher respondents were from special area classrooms, such as ESL, Art, Music, Physical Education, or Reading Support. School Three had 64% of the respondents from classroom teachers while only 36% of the respondents were from special area teaching assignments. This is another interesting difference in the respondent profiles that may have influenced the overall findings in both buildings regarding collaborative teams. However, it is important to point out that in both schools, teachers of special areas are assigned to collaborative groups and are expected to participate with their predetermined collaborative teams.

Overall, the demographic comparison data reveals a few small differences between the two schools that may be explained by the differences in the total number of participants in each school.

School One and School Three Organizational Structures

In order to understand the differences between School One and School Three it is important to understand how the two schools organizational structures are developed and implemented by the principals in each school. Principal interview data revealed some distinct differences in how district initiatives were implemented by the two principals.

In School One the principal discussed the new professional development time that was mandated by the new teacher contract, requiring teacher planning time each day from 8:00 to 8:30. The principal based his use of this professional development time on his own training as a building coach in years past. He was trained using the Schmoker model

and cycles of inquiry, which he still uses as a principal. There is no book study or anything “regimented” by his own design. The principal went on to describe the professional development model that he has implemented in his school. “For the past two years the teachers bring their data that they want to look at to the meetings. Each marking period they look at data and they come up with a plan of assessments, instruction and then look at assessments again. The teachers are expected to spend the half hour each day talking about what is working and not, sharing etc.” The teachers are not sitting with the principal each day and not being watched by him either. He feels they know what to do each day and he lets them do it. After an 8 to 9 week cycle, the teams talk about what worked and what did not work. The principal feels that even if their efforts did not improve student outcomes, the teachers still learned something through the inquiry cycle. In addition to the required half hour of collaboration each day there is time for vertical team sharing once per week. This year the principal assigned the professional learning groups by grade level because of the curricular focus.

In School Three the 8:00-8:30 professional development time is set by the teacher contract as well but had been implemented by the principal the year before being mandated by the district. The principal tries to make this time beneficial and has established a team planning time once per week where she sits in the meeting or a designated team-planning member sits in with each team. The purpose of her attendance in the meetings is to show her support of the teachers, and to keep the meeting topics relevant and focused on student needs. In addition to the morning professional development time, every second Monday is focused on RTII during afternoon meetings. Tuesday mornings they focus on their professional growth plans and Wednesdays they

have a staff breakfast. According to the principal, “This is important for the social aspect and for team building.” Thursdays are other staff meetings and Fridays they focus on curriculum, like the new Math this year. One Friday per month is the building focus on Common Core from 8:00-10:30, where the principal provides coverage for the teachers to engage in the planned professional development activity that she and her advisory team have prepared. Collaborative planning has been growing in this school over the past five years. They focus on their School Improvement Plan, best practices, and teacher led teams of inquiry based on teacher volunteers. The second Wednesday of each month is a district early release day for students. During this time the staff in each building work on district level goals.

While both schools have the required 8:00-8:30 team planning time and the second Wednesday of the month early release time for district work, the two schools vary greatly in the focus of the work as well as the organization of the work. There is also a large difference in the involvement of the principal in the teams. In School One the principal has more of a hands-off management style while Principal Three is very hands-on. She has an advisory team that helps her to plan the professional development activities, she sits in their team discussions when she can, and she helps to provide classroom coverage for teachers to meet and learn together. Principal Three also plans for the social aspect of growing the teachers collaborative team spirit in her school.

Similarities and Differences: School One and School Three

Principals in School One and School Three were asked how they planned for collaborative groupings with their staff. Specifically, they were asked how much choice do teachers have in terms of the colleagues that they work with during required

professional development times and what role did they have, if any, in deciding whom teachers worked with for professional development purposes.

The principal in School One shared that he uses a couple of different models to group teachers. “This year I have directed it. It seems to be okay because of the content work at each grade level. One of the first years that we worked collaboratively, everyone picked a Danielson domain to work on. Then the collaborative groups were made from those folks who picked similar interests based on the evaluation tool.” This year the principal in School One reported that the collaborative groups were assigned by him because he felt that there was a culture of people who did not do their own thinking. “The teachers were more passive and some people don’t like choice, they just want to be told what to do”. He also added that they don’t always like being assigned to groups but some teachers carry the weight more than others do.

The principal in School Three reports that establishing collaborative teams has been a process. In the beginning of her tenure in this school she had to mandate collaboration, but she also provided the support of time and resources for them. “Now this school is a place where the majority of the staff asks for the collaboration time.” She works with the teachers as they are ready for more collaboration. She wants to see things grow organically in the school, as the staff is ready for the changes. Principal Three reports that mutual trust and respect are the cornerstones of her collaborative work with teachers.

Principal Three also shared that grouping can vary greatly. “When there are grade level team meetings, there is no choice in the teams that they work with. However, they do have a voice in what teaching teams they work on each year. Teams change to make each team more collaborative from year to year.” Principal Three also shared that when

there are whole staff professional development times, she tries to create new teams to get teachers outside their own team thinking and power structures. These team configurations could also be based on teacher grade level or special teaching areas, complete free choice, a specific building focus, or vertical teams. The principal tries to make it a balance of choice and assignment during professional development times. She prefers more teacher choice than principal control at all times, however her goal is to let them pick where they need to be to get the most help professionally. Teacher groups in School Three are created in a variety of ways, offering some teacher choice and some planned groups, all of which are clearly articulated by the building principal. Time and support are offered to these collaborative groups as well as frequent time for teacher reflection on their progress throughout the school year. Time and support are offered to these collaborative groups as well as frequent time for teacher reflection on their progress throughout the school year.

The differences between the two schools in collaborative groupings and choice in how teachers work in those groups are significant and reflected in the organizational structure of the two schools and in the leadership styles of the principals. The survey data showed that both schools value collaborative work, however the structure of the collaborative work and the amount of choice may be a factor in the more favorable results shown in School Three.

Another major difference in the two schools is the intention of the collaborative work and the perceived outcomes of the work. While both principals were able to share their intended foci for professional development in their schools and both principals had positive perceptions of their building foci for collaborative groups as a form of professional development, their responses to interview questions shed light on the

differences in these two schools. Principal One seems to have set a plan for the staff at the beginning of the year and will evaluate this plan at the end of the school year.

However, he is unsure about how teachers feel about this work. “I don’t know if I know the answer to that. I don’t get the negative feedback so I hope that is OK. If the teachers talk across other schools, I would know more. I think the teachers like what they do.”

While Principal Three has a core team of teachers who help to set the goals for collaborative teams for the year. Most importantly, Principal Three asks teachers to reflect on their work often, as well as providing many other times for collaboration to occur beyond the required 8:00 to 8:30 time. Reflections that teachers write throughout the year act as her guide to know what teachers need and when then need it. She feels she is growing the collaborative work to a place where the majority of the staff asks for collaboration time now. She also talks about connecting the work to student improvement and having a clear vision for professional development that is tied to her school improvement plan. Trust and respect were themes that Principal Three and the teachers from School Three repeated throughout the interviews. “The principal sets up the professional development so that it is worthwhile. Never fluff. Everything pertains to what we are doing now, for example, the work on Common Core.” “She requires it, plans it, and maps it out for us. She covers classes so that it can happen for you. Plus all the committees she has started for the school. We get to choose our committee work.”

(Teacher 3, School 3).

Finally, the results of teacher surveys and face-to-face interviews in School One and School Three point to some very distinct differences in how collaborative teams are viewed in each school. While School One values collaboration as a form of professional

development, the vision and cohesive planning for it appear to be lacking and may be the cause of teacher frustration when asked to work with their peers. When the teachers from School One were asked to talk about their school goals, none of the teachers shared the same goal or goals. One of the teachers talked about the school having a vision but did not elaborate on what the vision for the building was. In contrast, when teachers from School Three were asked the same question, teachers were able to share the exact school goals, Common Core and their new math program. Some teachers shared other goals that related to the specific curriculum committee that they were working on as it related to the building goals. Teachers gave in-depth information about the school goals and were confident about the purpose of these goals as they spoke. School Three appears to have a clear vision for professional development that is tied to all of the school goals. One teacher from School Three reported the following, “Yes. Everything we do is exactly what we need to be working on.” Another teacher replied, “Yes. It is all connected to what we are doing. It all goes back to our School Improvement Plan.” Teachers and the principal in School Three are all able to articulate their goals and purpose, as it relates to student achievement.

Chapter 5

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter begins with a brief summary of the results of the study as they relate to prior research. The findings are broken into two parts. The first part summarizes the results of the survey component of the study encompassing all five participating schools. The second part of the summary focuses on the insights that were gained into the use of professional development teams in the two schools in which interviews were conducted with teachers and principals. Following the summary of the findings, implications of the findings are discussed as well as possibilities for future research. There may be implications for creating and sustaining collaborative teams in schools. There may also be implications for principals and school districts. In closing, the researcher will share key insights gained from the researcher's point of view and how the study could be improved for future research.

Summary of the Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine elementary teachers' perceptions of collaborative professional development teams. By understanding collaborative professional development practices from the teacher's perspective administrators may gain insight into creating purposeful professional development opportunities for teachers. The perspective of the elementary school principal was also considered in this study to see if there were relationships between teacher perceptions of collaborative professional development teams and the intended outcomes of collaborative professional development as designed by the administrators in the school setting. It should be noted that there were differences in both the number of and the roles of the respondents in School One as

compared to School Three, so the differences between these two schools may be at least partially explained by the nature of the respondents overall. This study helps us to understand some similarities and differences in teacher and administrator perceptions of the benefits of collaborative professional development teams within the participating schools. Informed administrators may find it useful to consider the implications of some of the positive perceptions held by teachers when participating in professional learning teams in their schools.

Summary of all Surveys

The survey results from all five schools revealed three important findings overall: 1) teachers had positive perceptions of collaborative teams and their impact, 2) principals generally had more positive perceptions than those of the teachers, and 3) teachers felt positive about principals having greater control over collaborative groups than teachers; however, there was some indication that too much control might begin to create less positive feelings on the part of teachers.

The survey results indicated that the vast majority of teachers generally believed their own practice had improved due to the collaborative experiences regardless of how they perceived the perceptions of other teachers in their building. Teachers believed overwhelmingly that collaborative work helped them to achieve their professional goals and that working with fellow teachers helped them to grow as a teacher regardless of the amount of principal control of those groups. Teachers also perceived that their teaching practices had changed for the better as a result of collaborative work. In addition, it was reported that teachers felt that they got meaningful help with their practice from their peers.

According to Rosenholtz (1989) teachers in collaborative schools learn to teach far easier and better than in other schools. Collaborative schools were also places where teachers sought ideas from their peers, shared expertise and experiences with others. Teachers in collaborative schools had more confidence in their teaching and were committed to continuous improvement. Little (1989) asserted that teachers can actually become better teachers just by being a part of a faculty in a collaborative school. Thus, this research seems to be reflective of these positive findings. The power of a collaborative workplace can make positive changes for everyone involved as teachers and principals perceived it.

Dufour and Eaker (1998, p. xi) believe that the most promising strategy for sustained, substantive school improvement is developing the ability of school personnel to function as professional learning communities. This belief seemed to be shared by all of the principals in the study as the principals had even more positive perceptions of collaborative work than the teachers. All of the schools in this study regularly provide collaborative experiences for their teachers and the building principals perceive this work very positively.

One of the most interesting results from chapter four revealed that when looking at teachers' perceptions of the amount of control the principal had in creating collaborative professional teams, there seems to be common perceptions that principals have greater control. However, this perception did not seem to negatively impact teachers' perceptions of the positive aspects of collaborative work. Overall, teachers believed that their personal practice and the practice of their colleagues have improved as a result of participating in collaborative experiences. Thus, teacher perceptions as reported in this

study would be in line with research that says teacher effectiveness improves when teachers have time to collaborate on student work, share best practices, and plan curriculum and lessons together (Darling-Hammond, 2009; Darling-Hammond, Wei, Richardson, Andee, & Orpanos, 2009). Although, it is important to point out that this study did not collect any student data to look at regarding teacher effectiveness.

Overall, teacher responses indicate that they value collaborative professional development teams even though they perceive having little control of the work that the team is expected to complete. It seems that teachers expect the principals to have greater control over the collaborative work and the planning of that work. However the survey results provided some evidence that there may be limits on how much control a principal can exert before it begins to create more negative teacher perceptions of collaborative work. The development of collaborative teams and guiding their work over time can be a delicate dance.

Findings from School One and School Three

As discussed in earlier chapters of this study, the term professional learning community focuses on teachers developing shared norms, beliefs, attitudes and trust in their work group. The results of this study show that not all professional learning communities, even within the same district, share the same characteristics. Just as Hargreaves (2012) discussed, the structure and direction of the professional learning community is dictated by administrators in some schools, as opposed to being decided upon by teachers. Hargreaves labels these types of professional learning communities as a form of contrived collegiality. Schools where professional learning communities develop through teacher led direction and autonomy are deemed true collaborative

cultures by Hargreaves. Some of the concepts seemed relevant in comparing the similarities and differences in the use of collaborative teams in School One and School Three.

The comparison of the survey data between School One and School Three indicated some very distinct differences. The analysis of the differences in teacher perceptions was looked at through two lenses. One lens was through the survey questions that asked about personal perceptions of collaborative work and the other lens was through survey questions that asked for teachers' perceptions of how others viewed collaborative work. By all accounts School Three data revealed that teachers were much more positive in their responses than teachers in School One. Survey questions that focused on the teachers perceptions of their own professional growth, improvement of personal teaching practices, achievement of their own professional goals, and that they themselves valued working collaboratively were all positive in School Three. No teacher in School Three responded "*strongly disagree*" to any of these questions. Only two responses of "*disagree*" were reported in School Three. While in School One there were several negative responses to all of these survey questions regarding the teachers' perceptions of their own growth in collaborative teams.

The responses in both schools followed a similar pattern when teachers were asked to give their perceptions of other teachers' beliefs about collaborative work. School One had many negative responses as well as some neutral responses to those types of questions while responses in School Three were much more favorable. Interviews in School One seemed to confirm the survey responses as well. Teachers in this least favorable school reported negative experiences with collaborative groups, felt frustrated by the negative

spirit of other professionals and yearned for the opportunity to have positive collaborative experiences in the future.

Perhaps one of the most interesting survey differences were the responses to the question that asked teachers if teachers generally believed that working collaboratively on professional development improves our practice. School One only had 37.5% favorable responses while School Three had 83.3% favorable responses. This was also confirmed by the interview responses. In School Three teachers became excited about their experiences when they saw student work improving as a result of their collaborative efforts and when they were able to make a positive contribution to others and their professional growth. In this same school, success seemed to breed more success and a greater willingness of teachers to take risks with new collegial groups. Several teachers shared that they felt a sense of accomplishment in their combined efforts. The teachers in School One did not report similar perceptions.

Finally, the survey question that asked teachers how often they collaborate on connecting their professional development to the school goals provided another example of the differences between the two schools. All teachers in School Three responded to one of the survey choices that indicated their collaborative work toward school goals as either monthly, quarterly, or annually. The choice of “never” had zero responses from School Three. In contrast, School One had one teacher respond that connecting work to school goals never took place. The interview responses in School One would support these responses to the question about identifying the school goals. Teachers in School One were either unclear about the school goals or could not respond to the interview question regarding their school goals.

The survey data in Schools One and School Three clearly indicated that teachers in School Three were not only more positive overall, but that the teachers perceptions and the principal perceptions were more closely aligned. School One data indicated the greatest differences in teacher perceptions when compared to the building principal perceptions across all five of the participating schools as well as the greatest standard deviation in teacher responses.

Three Themes

One possible reason for the differences in perceptions may be the three themes that were identified from the analysis of the interview responses in these two schools. The three themes that emerged from the interview data were used as a way to organize relevant data and draw conclusions based on this data. Interview data were organized by question number and respondent numbers in each school. Each question was analyzed for themes in School One and in School Three. Data was then organized by themes that developed in each school, then used to answer each research question and make comparisons of the two schools. Data from School One and School Three revealed three specific categories of differences between the schools as related to collaborative teams: 1) the structure of the collaborative work, 2) principal leadership style, and 3) connection to the school goals and the vision of the principal.

Structure

Teachers in both schools talked about the need for purposeful structures and adequate time for team collaboration. According to the interview responses Principal Three provided many opportunities for collaborative work, sat in on the work, and requested feedback from teachers throughout the year regarding their work. She believed that

through purposeful collaborative efforts her school would continue to grow. In contrast, Principal One set a plan for teachers' collaborative work at the beginning of the year and expected teachers to follow that plan. He did not feel the need to sit in on regular teacher meetings as he felt that the teachers knew what was expected of them and trusted them to meet their professional obligations. Principal One was more "hands off" in his structuring of the collaborative work than was Principal Three. The survey and interview responses from the teachers in School One indicate that while teachers complied with their assigned tasks they did not value the work that they did.

In collaborative cultures, uncertainty and failure are not protected or hidden, rather they are shared (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996) and discussed openly with a commitment of growing together. In School Three teachers in the advisory group shared what worked well and what did not with the principal on a regular basis. This was most likely an important factor in understanding why teachers in School Three valued the collaborative culture and were committed to the team work.

Teachers in this study also recognized the importance of having opportunities to share in vertical teams as well as in grade level teams, as these experiences helped them to see beyond the four walls of their own classrooms and grade levels. Teachers in School Three who had many opportunities for vertical team collaboration as well as grade team level sharing for the purpose of planning, valued those experiences. "The other teachers perspectives are great. It takes you out of your little world", was shared by a teacher in School Three. These experiences validate what Rogoff describes regarding the value of sociocultural theory, that learning takes place in everyday social contexts and that the learning itself takes place through communities of learners rather than through individual

understanding of concepts separate from the group interactions and experiences (Rogoff, et al, 1995). Purposeful reflecting, sharing of ideas and opinions, in a safe environment, were common themes for positive collaborative experiences, as reported by teachers in both schools.

As discussed earlier in this study, research indicates that meaningful and relevant professional development should involve the learners (teachers) in the identification of what is to be learned and in the development of the actual learning process and the learning opportunity (Borko & Putman, 1995; Little, 1993; Miller et al., 1994; Tilleman & Imants, 1995; Wisconsin Center for Educational Research [WCER], 2004-2005). The results of this study support this research as seen through teacher interviews in School Three. Teachers valued some choice in collaborative teams, yet they understood that the principal and her advisory team were instrumental in the planning of most team work. Principal Three valued the input from the advisory team in helping to develop purposeful learning opportunities for the teachers. A teacher in School One was disappointed in the change of the team structures set by the principal this year. He missed planning with the same group of teachers that he had worked with the previous year and longed for more positive experiences in the future. Lack of teacher involvement can lead to cynicism and detachment from school improvement efforts (Guskey, 1995; Hargreaves, 1995), as we have seen in the teacher interview responses from School One.

Leadership Style

Collaborative schools value the teacher as a person. There is a sense of respect for the more personal side of teachers and teacher vulnerabilities are not viewed as weaknesses, rather they are seen as a natural element of the person. In this study Principal Three made

one of the weekly common planning times a social event to purposefully break down the barriers of fear and isolation among staff. Teachers in School Three reported that the principal knows exactly what they need and plans for it. Teachers were respectful of her vision and were committed to the collaborative spirit in the building. Collaborative cultures respect, celebrate and make allowances for the teacher as person, according to Fullan and Hargreaves. To be in authentic relationships means that we need to provide long-term support for one another. Simply put, without underlying trust, respect, and time devoted to developing relationships with teachers, leaders will fail at all attempts to create collaborative cultures in their schools (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012).

Fullan and Hargreaves (1996) point out that the isolation of the classroom can be a refuge from collegial judgments regarding their practice. “We know that when a principal employs practices that support teacher learning, teachers thrive (Ackerman & Mackenzie, 2007; Blase & Blase, 2001; Donaldson, 2006, 2008; Kegan & Lahey, 2009) and we know, too, that such supports benefit students and student achievement (Guskey, 1999; Roy, 2005)” (Drago-Severson, 2012). The purposeful actions of Principal Three would support these claims. Teachers who served on the advisory committee understood and supported the purpose behind all of the collaborative groups that had been established by the principal. They enjoyed being a part of the leadership and planning for their fellow teachers and saw the benefits of their work over time.

The results of this study also show that the positive benefits of teacher collaboration can be contagious in a school. When the teachers in School Three created and implemented successful professional development experiences for their own building they were asked to lead a similar professional development session for others in the entire

district. According to Gallucci, (2008) when the individual's learning is taken up by others, for example; a grade level team, the school, or administrators, it has the potential to affect future learning and thus, return the cycle of learning. Teachers in School Three talked about their collective success in collaborative experiences, which generated more collaboration experiences with other teachers, in other schools within the district.

Connection to School Goals and Vision

Finally, the results of this study indicated that collaborative professional development teams can be successful when teachers see that their efforts are directly connected to student improvement and to clear school goals. Teachers who perceived their work to be meaningful and purposeful, knowing that their work was aligned to school goals viewed their work positively. With clear goals for the collaborative work, teachers were able to engage in meaningful conversations. Teachers in this study concurred, that sharing purposeful reflections, sharing of ideas and opinions, in a safe environment, were critical for positive collaborative experiences. Teachers in School Three shared how working in collaborative teams helped them to solve problems of practice together. Schmoker (2006) states that professional learning communities have emerged as the best and most agreed-upon means by which to improve instruction and student performance in schools. When teachers in School Three saw that their efforts were directly connected to student improvement they felt motivated to continue the work. While the results of this study did not include student performance data, there is evidence to support collaborative work based on the positive perceptions of all teachers and principals, especially those from School Three.

Principals must realize that collaborative cultures are highly sophisticated and cannot be created quickly. The principal in School Three had a clear vision of collaboration in her school. She carefully and purposefully cultivated the collaborative spirit in her school over several years. Many forms of collaboration and collegiality are superficial and can even be counter productive to the purpose of the school. The principal has a critical role to play in the development of a collaborative school. Having a strong vision is important but for the school to be successful the vision must be collective, not individual. In schools where goals are ambiguous and there is no clear direction or common sense of purpose, teachers feel uncertain about the school culture and about their own instructional practices (Azumi & Madhere, 1983; Glidewell et al., 1983). Teachers in School One were unable to speak about the overall school goals and their alignment to their collaborative work. Survey results from School One support teachers' perceptions of collaborative teams as well as the data gathered during interviews. On the other hand, all of the teachers in School Three were able to verbalize the same school goals and could speak to the connections with their collaborative professional development goals. This was also indicated in the survey results from School Three.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited by the parameters of its design within a case study approach and was also limited to data collection in the Northeastern region over one year's time. While the participants of this study were from one urban school district, they do not necessarily represent other urban schools and districts across all of the Northeastern region. The lack of prolonged engagement with respondents and the researchers ability to establish rapport in order to obtain in-depth and authentic responses from participants

could have an impact on the responses provided to the researcher. The study was also limited to elementary schools where principals were willing to allow staff to participate, and therefore may have created a bias in the survey results. The number of teacher survey respondents as well as the roles that the survey respondents played (general classroom teacher vs. specialists) varied across all the five participating schools. The low teacher survey return rate from School One as compared to the other four schools in this study is a notable limitation. Also, the difficulty in scheduling interviews as well as teacher willingness to participate in interviews in School One was another notable limitation for the researcher. Overall, a limited number of personal interviews were conducted in this study and were not inclusive of all respondents based on time available for interviews during the school day, permission from the building administrator to participate, and the willingness of the respondents. Therefore, findings from this study should be interpreted with these limitations in mind.

Implications

Implications for Principals

The findings of this study underscore a need for clear structures and supports for collaborative work to take place effectively in schools. Teachers in School Three talked about the many ways in which collaborative teams were developed and implemented that made their work meaningful. In School Three, the structure and implementation of all collaborative team meetings were established by the principal and the advisory team. This key element of collaborative planning was vital to the success of all collaborative work in School Three. The principal expected her advisory group of teachers to share what was working well for the faculty and what other types of work that they may need

in the future. Principal Three was committed to giving teachers a voice in their work and having time to reflect on the results of that work. Principal Three shared that this type of work was the result of three years of commitment to collaborative teams and that this was her vision for growing teachers in this school.

Another key element was the need for teachers to feel safe and valued when participating in the collaborative groups. The leadership style of the two principals had an impact on the perceptions shared by the teachers in each school. Teachers perceived the work positively when the teacher as a person was valued and supported. Principal Three established one morning a week to meet as a faculty in a social setting. This social gathering was purposefully established to help teachers connect to one another on a more personal level. Collaborative schools value the teacher as a person. There is a sense of respect for the more personal side of teachers and vulnerabilities are not viewed as weaknesses, rather they are seen as a natural element of the teacher. In this study Principal Three made one of the weekly common planning times a social event to purposefully break down the barriers of fear and isolation among staff. Collaborative cultures respect, celebrate and make allowances for teacher as person, according to Fullan and Hargreaves. To be in authentic relationships means that we need to provide long-term support for one another. Simply put, without underlying trust, respect, and time devoted to developing relationships with teachers, leaders will fail at all attempts to create collaborative cultures in their schools (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012).

Finally, this study revealed that when principals have clear goals and a vision to connect to teacher work, teachers view collaborative experiences positively. Teachers in School Three shared how their collaborative work helped them to grow as professionals

and share problems of practice together. Principals who want to build capacity in their schools on reciprocal learning processes that enable teachers to construct knowledge and meanings toward a shared purpose of schooling should have a long-range plan for this work (Lambert, 1998). The findings of this research would support the assertions of this research, as principal in School Three shared her long-range vision for professional development with her staff and with her advisory team. Shared learning creates a shared purpose, which is the foundation for the democratization of schools. The principal advisory group in School and the opportunities for teacher choice in some collaborative groups seemed to help teachers connect to their shared purpose of learning. Teachers in School Three reported that they knew that their school goals and their collaborative work were all connected. This collaborative endeavor in leading learning in schools releases the authority of one to the empowerment of the staff (Lambert, 1998). “Collective empowerment and responsibility combined with non-judgmental transparency is one of the fairest and most authentic forms of accountability we know” (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012, p.169). The principal’s place in this approach is as facilitator rather than as authority figure (Blase & Blase, 2001; Fullan, 2003). This seems to be the vision of Principal Three, which has proven to be successful for her and her school. Principal Three created goals around her vision, set up the year long plan with her advisory group, created the time and supports for the teachers to meet, and she participated in the meetings along with her advisory team. She monitored the success and needs of her teams monthly and was able to correct problems along the way. Where as the principal in School One took a “hands-off” approach in his school, relying on teachers to fulfill their professional obligations as stated to them at the beginning of the school year.

Implications for Districts

The findings of this study point to the need for principals to have clearly defined school goals that are connected to the professional development work that teachers are expected to perform. Collaborative work was perceived to be positive and valuable when the work was clearly connected to school goals.

Purposeful and meaningful professional development for teachers is one of the most important tasks for schools and districts. Therefore, it is critical for schools and districts to look to research for guidance and support in finding powerful ways to improve schools. While the intent of professional development programs remains the same regardless of their content and format, reviews of professional development programs consistently point out the ineffectiveness of most programs (Cohen & Hill, 1998, 2000; Kennedy, 1998; Wang et al., 1999). There may be many factors that contribute to the ineffectiveness of programs, it has been suggested that there are two critical factors that identify these failures: “(1) what motivates teachers to engage in professional development, and (2) the process by which change in teachers typically occurs” (Guskey, 1986, Guskey, 2002, p. 382). By understanding teacher perceptions of collaborative professional work coupled with understanding the key findings from research on effective professional development, schools and districts will be able to make appropriate decisions regarding the professional development needed for their staff. This research would support these findings. Teachers who could connect their work to goals and student growth valued this work. According to the report prepared by Linda Darling-Hammond, Ruth Chung Wei, Alethea Andree, Nikole Richardson, and Stelios Orphanos of Stanford University, on the status of professional development in the United States

(NSDC, 2009), key findings in effective professional development programs include the following four components:

1. Professional development should be intensive, ongoing, and connected to practice.
2. Professional development should focus on student learning and address the teaching of specific curriculum content.
3. Professional development should align with school improvement priorities and goals.
4. Professional development should build strong working relationships among teachers.

The results of this study showed that School Three, in particular, included all four of these components in the form of collaborative professional development groups. Grade level groups met on a regular basis to work on specific content areas and problems of practice. Professional discussions were always related to improving student achievement. Teachers in School Three were all able to verbalize the focus of their professional development work as it related to the school goals and improvement priorities. The principal in School Three made conscious efforts to improve collegial relationships as well as collaborative professional development practices.

This study revealed that while there were two schools within the same district that used collaborative teams as a means for professional development, the results of that work appeared to be very different as indicated by the survey results and face-to-face interviews in those schools. Teacher perceptions in School Three were much more favorable than those in School One for many reasons as discussed earlier. However, there

appeared to be no formal structures set by the district for the collaborative work other than the contracted 8:00-8:30 time daily. By the accounts of the teachers and principals in both schools, School Three seemed to be making great progress in collaborative work while School One appeared to be stuck.

Districts should be aware of the difference between “stuck” and “moving” schools within their own schools. As Rosenholtz (1989) discusses, there are two types of schools, the one type of school she calls “stuck” or “learning impoverished”, where teachers usually worked alone and were not supportive of change or improvements. The second type of school she calls a “moving” school or “learning enriched” school. The learning enriched school was found to have collaborative characteristics where as the “stuck” school showed signs of contrived collegiality. However, some contrivance is actually necessary in the establishment of collaborative cultures. But if done badly, Fullan and Hargreaves (1996) warn that contrived collegiality can reduce teachers’ motivation to participate further. Both types of schools can and do exist in the same district therefore district administrators need to be able to distinguish between these schools and be prepared to provide the supports for improvement. Senior leaders in school districts should provide opportunities for principals to share what is working well and what is not working well in their schools. Just as teachers benefit from collaboration with their peers it would be beneficial for school leaders to collaborate regarding the successes or needs of ongoing professional development in their schools. Rosenholtz’s research is clear, collaborative schools do better than individualistic ones. Collaborative schools are characterized by hard working and dedicated teachers, a sense of collective responsibility, and pride in their school (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012).

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study overwhelmingly suggest that teachers perceive collaborative teams as a means of professional development in schools. The participants in this study viewed collaborative groups positively overall. More importantly the principals all viewed collaborative groups more favorably than did their staff. The finding that the researcher was most surprised by was the fact that teachers expect principals to exert greater control over collaborative groups and that they still perceived this model of professional development favorably. The participants in the most positive school also suggested that a link to school goals and to student learning were important components of the collaborative work. This study, however, did not examine student learning or achievement so it is not possible to link positive professional perceptions to student growth and development. With that in mind, it would be recommended for future studies to examine schools where teacher collaboration is viewed favorably by the principal and teachers and to examine the impact of that work on student learning.

It may be helpful if a research study were conducted in which the researcher had an opportunity to study the work of a collaborative professional development teams over time. A study that lasted over the course of a year or more could identify the high and low points of the teams, facilitating factors, and the obstacles the team faced. It would also be important to know the types of supports that were helpful to the team and what they perceived as negative over the course of time.

This study also revealed that purposeful structure within the schools had an influence on the perceptions of teachers with regard to the collaborative teams that they participated in. The two schools in this study had very different structures in place that

were developed by the principals in those schools. It would be recommended to look more closely at other schools and their structures of collaborative teams to see if there are additional factors that may influence collaborative teams either positively or negatively. By studying the structures created by the principal over an extended time and identifying common practices in each building that teachers perceive to be positive, a list of key structures may evolve for principals. These key elements could be essential tools to implement and sustain collaborative teams as a means for professional learning in schools.

Finally, the leadership style of the principals in both schools influenced the perceptions of the teachers. A study that looks at the leadership styles of principals in more than two settings over an extended period of time might reveal other practices that principals' can employ to create positive collaborative teams for professional growth. This study indicated that teachers who served on an advisory team with the principal felt supported and valued the collaborative work. A study that identifies other leadership styles and practices may link positive principal qualities to improved collaborative teams in schools. By studying principal leadership style, conversations between and among principals may begin to open new pathways for improving schools.

Conclusion

This study enabled the researcher to learn much about collaborative professional development from the teacher's perspective. The literature review in addition to the research study has provided this researcher with a great understanding of the characteristics of quality collaborative professional development teams, the best ways to implement collaborative teams, and teachers' perceptions of the use of collaborative

teaming. The findings of this study will support the work that the researcher does in her own school as a result.

The information gathered in the survey portion of the study was very useful data for this researcher. The survey data allowed the researcher to gain an over all understanding of teachers perceptions of collaborative professional teams and what aspects of collaboration are seen as most positive by teachers and why. The most interesting and surprising data was that the amount of principal control in the creation of the collaborative teams and in the direction of the teams had little to no affect on the teachers' view of the work. Teachers still viewed the collaborative work favorably even when they had little to no control of that work. Teachers viewed it much more favorably when they understood that their work was aligned to school goals and when they saw positive effects in student learning.

However, the most important data that the researcher gathered was in the face-to-face interviews in the two schools. The personal contact with each of the participants was extremely helpful in understanding the perceptions of collaborative teams in the most favorable school and in the least favorable school. While teachers in both schools were passionate about their work with children, the teachers in the least favorable school were unable to connect the purpose of the collaborative teams to their work in the classroom. Teachers in the most favorable school were able to explicitly verbalize the direct connection of their collaborative work to teaching and learning. Both schools expressed the importance of the vertical team collaborative experience as a positive way to expand their professional learning and shared experiences.

The goal of the study was to examine elementary teachers' perceptions of collaborative professional development teams. It was hoped that by understanding collaborative professional development practices from the teacher's perspective the results may give administrators insight into creating purposeful professional development opportunities for teachers. As discussed earlier, this is not an easy task for building administrators and school districts. While the work is hard, it is certainly achievable, as the research suggests.

As with any research, there are limitations in regard to the amount of time spent with respondents. Knowing the results of this study, this researcher would have conducted more interviews with classroom teachers in School One to compare their responses to the classroom teacher responses from School Three. While the additional interviews may not have changed the overall outcome of the negative reflections that were shared in School One, they may have been able to yield comparisons among and between classroom teachers in these schools. Those additional interviews may have added more depth to the study.

Another way that this study could have improved would have been for the researcher to observe collaborative team meetings in both schools. By observing the team meetings, recording team dialogue, and asking follow up questions of the participants, the study would be richer in evidence from both schools. Because the researcher had only one day for interviews in each school and limited time with each respondent, there was not time to ask follow up questions at either site. Additional time in the schools and the observation of collaborative groups could have improved this study.

In conclusion, this study offered the researcher the opportunity to expand her knowledge of the pros and cons of collaborative teams as a means for providing professional development for teachers. Providing high quality professional development for teachers may not be an easy task, but it must be our unending focus if we are truly going to provide our students with the quality education that they deserve. Little (1989) believes that teachers can actually become better teachers just by being a part of a faculty in a collaborative school. The power of a collaborative workplace can make positive changes for everyone involved.

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APPENDIX A: LETTER OF PERMISSION

Rachel J. Martin
695 Prospect Road
Mount Joy, PA 17552
(717) 875-4777

Date February 10, 2014

Dear Mr. _____,

My name is Rachel J. Martin and I am the principal of Farmdale Elementary School in the Hempfield School District. I am presently working on my doctoral degree in Educational Leadership through Penn State University. I understand how busy people are during the school year; however, I hope that you will assist me in my research. I have chosen the School District of Lancaster because of its ongoing commitment to professional development. My request is to conduct a brief, twenty-question survey in six of your elementary schools this spring. The survey is a web-based tool in a Likert scale format that will take teachers approximately five to ten minutes to complete.

I am conducting a research study that will examine elementary teachers' perceptions of collaborative professional development. Understanding collaborative professional development practices from the teacher perspective will provide insight to administrators when creating professional development opportunities for teachers. In this study, the perspective of the elementary school principal will also be considered to see if there are relationships between the perceptions of collaborative professional teams and the intended outcomes of professional collaboration as designed by the administrators in the school setting. In addition to the survey, I may also ask to schedule personal interviews and a site visit with selected teachers and principals.

As previously mentioned, the intended outcome of this study is to better understand collaborative professional development practices from the teachers' perspective and to provide administrators with insight when planning professional development for their staff. While there is much research to support the need for collaborative instructional teams and collegial practices, teachers' feelings regarding this practice of collaborative work is not well documented at the elementary level. Therefore, there is good reason to attend more closely to the accounts of teachers, if schools intend to develop rich professional development experiences for teachers that significantly impact student learning.

I know how busy you are so I would like to thank you in advance for your cooperation. I believe that this study will be of benefit to your team and the quality of professional development in your schools. If you have any questions pertaining to this study, please contact me by email (rachel_martin@hempfieldsd.org) or by phone at (717) 875-4777.

Sincerely,

Rachel J. Martin

APPENDIX B: OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND PROTECTIONS LETTER

Date: April 15, 2014

From: The Office for Research Protections - FWA#: FWA00001534
Jodi L. Mathieu, Research Compliance Analyst

To: Rachel Martin

Re: Determination of Exemption

IRB Protocol ID: 45360

Follow-up Date: April 14, 2019

Title of Protocol: A study of teachers' and administrators' perceptions of collaborative teacher teams as a strategy for professional development

The Office for Research Protections (ORP) has received and reviewed the above referenced eSubmission application. It has been determined that your research is exempt from IRB initial and ongoing review, as currently described in the application. You may begin your research. The category within the federal regulations under which your research is exempt is:

45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Given that the IRB is not involved in the initial and ongoing review of this research, it is the investigator's responsibility to review [IRB Policy III "Exempt Review Process and Determination"](#) which outlines:

- • What it means to be exempt and how determinations are made
- • What changes to the research protocol are and are not required to be reported to the ORP
- • Ongoing actions post-exemption determination including addressing problems and complaints, reporting closed research to the ORP and research audits
- • What occurs at the time of follow-up

Please do not hesitate to contact the Office for Research Protections (ORP) if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you for your continued efforts in protecting human participants in research.

This correspondence should be maintained with your research records.

APPENDIX C-1: TEACHER LETTER OF INVITATION

Rachel J. Martin
695 Prospect Road
Mount Joy, PA 17552
(717) 875-4777

Date _____

Dear Teacher _____:

My name is Rachel J. Martin and I am the principal of Farmdale Elementary School in the Hempfield School District. I am presently working on my doctoral degree in Educational Leadership through Penn State University. As an elementary school principal myself, I understand how busy you are during the school year; however, I hope that you will assist me in my research by completing a brief on-line survey. The survey results will be completely anonymous and you will in no way be identified by your responses.

I am conducting a research study that will examine elementary teachers' perceptions of collaborative professional development teams. Understanding collaborative professional development practices from the teacher's perspective will provide insight to administrators when creating professional development opportunities for teachers. The perspective of the elementary school principal will also be considered in this study to see if there are relationships between the perceptions of teacher collaborative professional teams and the intended outcomes of professional development collaboration as designed by the administrators in the school setting. In addition to the survey, I may also ask to schedule a personal interview and site visit with you.

As previously mentioned, the intended outcome of this study is to better understand collaborative professional development practices from the teachers' perspective and to provide administrators with insight when planning professional development for their staff. While there is much research to support the need for collaborative instructional teams and collegial practices, teachers' feelings regarding this practice of collaborative work is not well documented at the elementary level. Therefore, there is good reason to attend more closely to the accounts of teachers, if schools intend to develop rich professional development experiences for teachers that significantly impact student learning.

I know how busy you are so I would like to thank you in advance for your cooperation. I believe that this study will be of benefit to you and the quality of professional development in your school. If you have any questions pertaining to this study, please contact me by email (rachel_martin@hempfieldsd.org) or by phone at (717) 875-4777.

Sincerely,
Rachel J. Martin

APPENDIX C-2: PRINCIPAL LETTER OF INVITATION

Rachel J. Martin
695 Prospect Road
Mount Joy, PA 17552
(717) 875-4777

Date

Dear Principal _____:

My name is Rachel J. Martin and I am the principal of Farmdale Elementary School in the Hempfield School District. I am presently working on my doctoral degree in Educational Leadership through Penn State University. As an elementary school principal myself, I understand how busy you are during the school year; however, I hope that you will assist me in my research by completing an on-line survey. The survey results will be completely anonymous and you will in no way be identified by your responses.

I am conducting a research study that will examine elementary teachers' perceptions of collaborative professional development teams. Understanding collaborative professional development practices from the teacher's perspective will provide insight to administrators when creating professional development opportunities for teachers. The perspective of the elementary school principal will also be considered in this study to see if there are relationships between the perceptions of teacher collaborative professional teams and the intended outcomes of professional development collaboration as designed by the administrators in the school setting. In addition to the survey, I would also like to schedule a personal interview and site visit with you.

As previously mentioned, the intended outcome of this study is to better understand collaborative professional development practices from the teachers' perspective and to provide administrators with insight when planning professional development for their staff. While there is much research to support the need for collaborative instructional teams and collegial practices, teachers' feelings regarding this practice of collaborative work is not well documented at the elementary level. Therefore, there is good reason to attend more closely to the accounts of teachers, if schools intend to develop rich professional development experiences for teachers that significantly impact student learning.

I know how busy you are so I would like to thank you in advance for your cooperation. I believe that this study will be of benefit to you and the quality of professional development in your school. If you have any questions pertaining to this study, please contact me by email (rachel_martin@hempfieldsd.org) or by phone at (717) 875-4777.

Sincerely,

Rachel J. Martin

APPENDIX D-1: Teacher Survey Questions**A STUDY OF TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING GROUPS****A Survey of Teachers**

This survey is designed to collect information regarding elementary teachers' perception of collaborative professional development teams. Understanding collaborative professional development practices from the teacher's perspective will provide insight to administrators when creating professional development opportunities for teachers. Please review and complete all of the questions listed on the survey. Once you have completed the survey, please follow the instructions on your computer screen. Thank you for participating in this study.

Please tell me a little about yourself and your school:

1. Please indicate the total number of years you have been teaching:
 - a) 0-5
 - b) 6-10
 - c) 11-15
 - d) 16-20
 - e) 20+

2. What is your gender?
 - a) Male
 - b) Female

3. What is your age?
 - a) 25-35
 - b) 36-45
 - c) 46-55
 - d) 56-65
 - e) 66 +

4. What is your highest level of education?
 - a) Bachelors degree
 - b) Masters degree
 - c) Doctoral degree

5. What grade level do you teach?
 - a) Pre-K- K
 - b) 1- 2
 - c) 3-4
 - d) 5- 6

6. During scheduled professional development times I typically collaborate with:
 - a) No other teachers
 - b) One other teacher
 - c) Two other teachers
 - d) Three other teachers
 - e) Four or more other teachers

7. How often do teachers here collaborate on connecting our professional development options to our annual school goals?
 - a) monthly
 - b) quarterly
 - c) semi-annually
 - d) yearly
 - e) never

8. I typically work more with:
 - a) teachers from my grade level
 - b) teachers from other grade levels
 - c) I work equally with teachers from my grade level and other grade levels

9. How much control does the principal of your school have in creating collaborative professional development teams of teachers?
 - a) much greater control than teachers
 - b) greater control than teachers
 - c) about the same amount of control as teachers
 - d) less control than teachers
 - e) much less control than teachers

10. How would you describe the amount of control that the principal of the school has in directing the work of collaborative professional teams?
 - a) Much greater control than teachers
 - b) Greater control than teachers
 - c) About the same amount of control as teachers
 - d) Less control than teachers
 - e) Much less control than teachers

The following questions will use a five point Likert scale for all responses.
(Likert Scale: 1-strongly agree, 2-agree, 3-neutral/undecided, 4-disagree, 5-strongly disagree)

11. I learn more when I work collaboratively with other professionals in this building than when I work alone.
12. Collaborative professional development work in my opinion is a waste of time.
13. Collaborative professional development helps me achieve my professional goals.
14. Working collaboratively with my fellow professionals has helped me to grow as a teacher.
15. Teachers at my grade level really value working on collaborative professional development teams.
16. My teaching practices have changed for the better as a result of working on collaborative professional development teams.
17. Teachers in this building generally believe that working collaboratively on professional development improves our practice.
18. I believe that I get meaningful help with my practice from other teachers in this school through collaborative professional development teams.
19. Teaching practices, in general, have changed for the better as a result of working on collaborative professional development teams in this school.

APPENDIX D-2: Principal Survey Questions**A STUDY OF TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING GROUPS
A Survey of Principals**

This survey is designed to collect information regarding elementary teachers' and principals' perception of collaborative professional development teams. Understanding collaborative professional development practices from the teacher's perspective will provide insight to administrators when creating professional development opportunities for teachers. Please review and complete all of the questions listed on the survey. Once you have completed the survey, please follow the instructions on your computer screen. Thank you for participating in this study.

Please tell me a little about yourself and your school:

1. Please indicate the total number of years that you have been a principal:
 - a) 0-5
 - b) 6-10
 - c) 11-15
 - d) 16-20
 - e) 21 +

2. What is your gender?
 - a) Male
 - b) Female

3. What is your age?
 - a) 25-35
 - b) 36-45
 - c) 46-55
 - d) 56-65
 - e) 66 +

4. What is your highest level of education?
 - a) Bachelors degree
 - b) Masters degree

c) Doctoral degree

5. What grade levels are in your building? Check all that apply.

a) Pre-K-K

b) 1-2

c) 3-4

d) 5-6

6. Please indicate if your school is a Title One school.

a) yes

b) no

7. During scheduled professional development times teachers typically collaborate with:

a) No other teachers

b) One other teacher

c) Two other teachers

d) Three other teachers

e) Four or more other teachers

8. How often do teachers here collaborate on connecting their professional development options to the annual school goals?

a) monthly

b) quarterly

c) semi-annually

d) yearly

e) never

9. Teachers here typically work with:

a) teachers from their own grade level

b) teachers from other grade levels

c) teachers from their own grade level and other grade levels

10. I typically work with teacher teams:

a) monthly

b) quarterly

c) semi-annually

d) yearly

e) never

11. How much control do you have in creating collaborative professional development teams of teachers?

a) much greater control than teachers

b) greater control than teachers

- c) about the same amount of control as teachers
- d) less control than teachers
- e) much less control than teachers

12. How would you describe the amount of control you have in directing the work of collaborative professional teams?

- a) much greater control than teachers
- b) greater control than teachers
- c) about the same amount of control as teachers
- d) less control than teachers
- e) much less control than teachers

The following questions will use a five point Likert scale for all responses.
(Likert Scale: 1-strongly agree, 2-agree, 3-neutral/undecided, 4-disagree, 5-strongly disagree)

13. Teachers learn more when they work collaboratively with other professionals in this building than when they work alone.

14. Collaborative professional development work in my opinion is a waste of time.

15. Collaboration professional development helps teachers to achieve their professional goals.

16. Working collaboratively with fellow professionals has helped me to grow as a principal.

17. Teachers in this school really value working on collaborative professional development teams.

18. I believe that teachers get meaningful help with their practice from other teachers in this school through collaborative professional development teams.

19. Teachers in this building generally believe that working collaboratively on professional development improves their practice.

21. Teaching practices, in general, have changed for the better as a result of working on collaborative professional development teams.

22. Teachers are required to work collaboratively in this school.

23. I seek out the professional opinions of teachers in this school regarding their professional development options.

APPENDIX E-1: Teacher Interview Questions

Teacher Interview Questions

1. Can you please start by briefly describing your teaching career?
2. Please talk about collaborative professional development opportunities for the teachers in this school?
3. Can you tell me how you feel about working collaboratively with other teachers during professional development times?
4. What are the most useful or powerful aspects of working collaborative?
5. What are some of the things that make working collaboratively less successful or difficult?
6. Can you share a story about a situation in which a collaborative professional development opportunity worked really well for you? Why do you think it worked so well?
7. Can you share a story about a situation in which collaborative professional development opportunity did not work so well for you? Why do you think it did not work so well?
8. What role does the principal play in collaborative professional work?
9. How much choice do teachers have in terms of the colleagues that they work with for professional development purposes? What role does the principal play, if any, in deciding whom teachers will work with for professional development purposes?
10. Can you talk about what you see as this school's primary goals?
11. Do you feel that your professional development opportunities are aligned with the annual goals of the school?
12. Is there anything else that you would like to share about your own professional development experiences in this school?

APPENDIX E-2: Principal Interview Questions

Principal Interview Questions

1. Can you briefly tell me about your career as a teacher and principal?
2. Please tell me about collaborative professional development opportunities for the teachers in this school?
3. What do you see as the most powerful reasons for having teachers work collaboratively?
4. What do you see as some of the difficulties or drawbacks in asking teachers to work together collaboratively?
5. What role do you play in supporting collaborative teacher work?
6. Can you share a story about a situation in which collaborative professional development opportunities worked really well? Why do you think it worked so well?
7. Can you share a story about a situation in which collaborative professional development opportunities did not work so well? Why do you think it did not work so well?
8. How much choice do teachers have in terms of the colleagues that they work with for professional development purposes? What role do you play, if any, in deciding whom teachers will work with for professional development purposes?
9. To what extent do you think the teachers in this building value working collaboratively with each other? What factors make a difference in how they feel about collaboration as you see it?
10. What do you see as this school's most important goals?
11. Do you feel that your intended professional development goals for the teachers are being met through collaborative professional development offerings in this school?
12. Is there anything else that you would like to share regarding the professional development opportunities for teachers in this school?

Vita

Rachel Jeanne Martin was born in Sewickley, Pennsylvania on February 13, 1960. After graduating from Moon High School in 1978 she attended Westminster College in New Wilmington, Pennsylvania for two years. She transferred to Juniata College where she earned a Bachelor of Arts in Early Childhood Education in 1982. She earned her Master's degree in Elementary Education at Millersville University in 1985, while working as a graduate assistant in the lab school. That same year she began teaching in the School District of Lancaster as a primary teacher. In 1995, Rachel earned her principal certification from Penn State University and held two different principal positions in that same district until 2000. From 2000 until 2002 she was an elementary school principal in the Unionville-Chadds Ford School District. Following that position, Rachel became the Principal at Farmdale Elementary School, in Hempfield School District. She enrolled in the Educational Leadership Doctoral Program at Penn State University in 2005. Rachel continues to lead Farmdale Elementary School today.