

Quality of Professional Life for Teachers:  
Identifying the Behaviors and Characteristics of Teachers  
Which Influence Their Professional Lives

by

Jeffrey J. Thomas

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Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Arnold Danzig, Chair  
Gustavo Fischman  
Charlotte Boyle

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## ABSTRACT

This study examined the quality of professional life at a Title I school that has achieved the Arizona Department of Education's highest accountability rating of Excelling for eight consecutive years. By examining the factors that influence the school environment including teachers' attitudes and the connections within the teacher community at this school, a description emerged of the factors that influenced the quality of professional lives of teachers. This descriptive study sought to describe, "What is the quality of professional life for teachers at a Title I elementary school with a history of high levels of student achievement?" The research was conducted at Seneca Elementary school (a pseudonym) in the Seneca School District (a pseudonym). By examining the quality of professional life for teachers in a highly ranked Title I school, a better understanding of the quality of professional life may lead to recommendations for other schools with high levels of poverty on how to support teachers who work in high poverty schools. Within a theoretical framework of motivation-hygiene theory and socio-cultural theory, the study identified principal leadership as a primary supporting factor of quality of professional life. The study also identified lack of input and lack of teacher control over curriculum and instruction as barriers to quality of professional life. Teachers described principal leadership, environment, social factors and teacher identity as contributors to enhancing the quality of professional life. Trust and focus emerged as additional factors that improved the workplace for teachers.

This study is dedicated to my wife, Susan, who saw the peaks and valleys of the doctoral journey and the challenge of working full-time while pursuing this academic achievement. She demonstrated patience and support, especially during the time when I battled cancer. It is also dedicated to my son, Alek, who some day will finish his own studies in pursuit of knowledge. He understands that education is the key to life's possibilities, especially in an uncertain and changing world. We did this together!

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Many researchers have argued that the state of urban education is one of extreme contrasts. A variety of indicators suggest that schools serving high poverty students and students from diverse ethnic backgrounds continue to be short-changed by the public education system (Kozol, 2005). Many urban schools experience inadequate funding, narrow and disengaging curriculum, gaps in school leadership, and a high degree of teacher turnover. A more subtle form of underfunding is the concentration of less experienced (and less expensive) teachers in urban school districts, and poorer schools in wealthier districts (Kozol, 2005). Anyon concluded, “The least advantaged U.S. children begin their formal schooling in consistently lower-quality schools” (2005, p. 66). No single factor has been identified as the panacea for fixing urban schools that continue to provide an education that does not fully prepare students for their role as productive citizens in society or work toward closing the achievement gap per NCLB. There are some factors, however, that create a stronger ability to impact a quality education for disadvantaged students. According to Berliner, the real challenge is not what contributions and commitments are made for school reform; rather, the need for reform is outside the classroom addressing poverty as a societal challenge (2006).

Improving classrooms and schools, working on curricula and standards, improving teacher quality and fostering better technology are certainly helpful. But sadly, such activities may also be similar to those of the drunk found on his hands and knees under a street lamp. When asked by a

passerby what he was doing, the drunk replied that he was looking for his keys. When asked where he lost them, the drunk replied 'over there,' and pointed back up the dark street. When the passerby then asked the drunk why he wasn't looking for the keys where they were located, the drunk answered, ' the light is better here!' (Berliner, 2006, p. 951).

These criticisms of the current education system may not be accurate for all schools that serve students of poverty. If Berliner (2006) is correct, then the purpose of this study would be to examine why a Title I elementary school fails to meet the needs of students and is symbolic of the entire educational system and its failures. I believe that Berliner does not address schools that achieve success in spite of high levels of poverty. Seneca is such a school. He contends that the problems associated with poverty leave schools essentially powerless to influence change in the educational setting (Berliner, 2006), suggesting that in order to improve education, poverty must be addressed first. Fullan provides an even more ardent stance, that unless there is widespread system reform, public education in the United States will continue to decline (2010). Fullan provides models of successful attempts at school reform that demonstrate what can happen when there is alignment with leadership, vision and direction (2010). This study may tell a story that could shed some light on a school with student success and the quality of life for teachers who influence this success. Too often research focuses on what may be missing instead of what may be present. Research examines what is broken as opposed to other frameworks that may take a more optimistic approach. I chose to look at an excelling Title I school and its teachers,

rejecting the concept of looking for deficiencies, and instead will look at this particular school, which has a history of high levels of student achievement.

Part of the difficulty in changing the efficacy of urban education is understanding the deficiencies in the present system. The current educational structure falls short of its ability to be flexible in meeting the various needs of unique populations and complexities of communities and has been that way since its inception (Tyack, 1974). Yet, this study may indicate that some school settings and professional environments lend themselves to examination that may suggest that success with students exists under the current system. In high poverty schools, many of the demands placed on teachers require a variety of skills and characteristics that often reach far beyond the classroom. These demands may contribute to a poor quality of professional life for teachers and may lead to high teacher turnover. Understanding the variables that impact teacher quality of life is an important first step.

A key factor in the success of any school is the quality and stability of the teachers (Ingersoll, 2001, 2002; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). For school districts, the need to recruit and retain quality teachers in urban schools is one of the greatest challenges they face (Bradley & Loadman, 2005). The challenge to recruitment and retain quality teachers transcends all types of schools. However, urban schools tend to have particularly high turnover rates (Anyon, 2005; Ingersoll, 2001, 2002; Kozol, 2005).



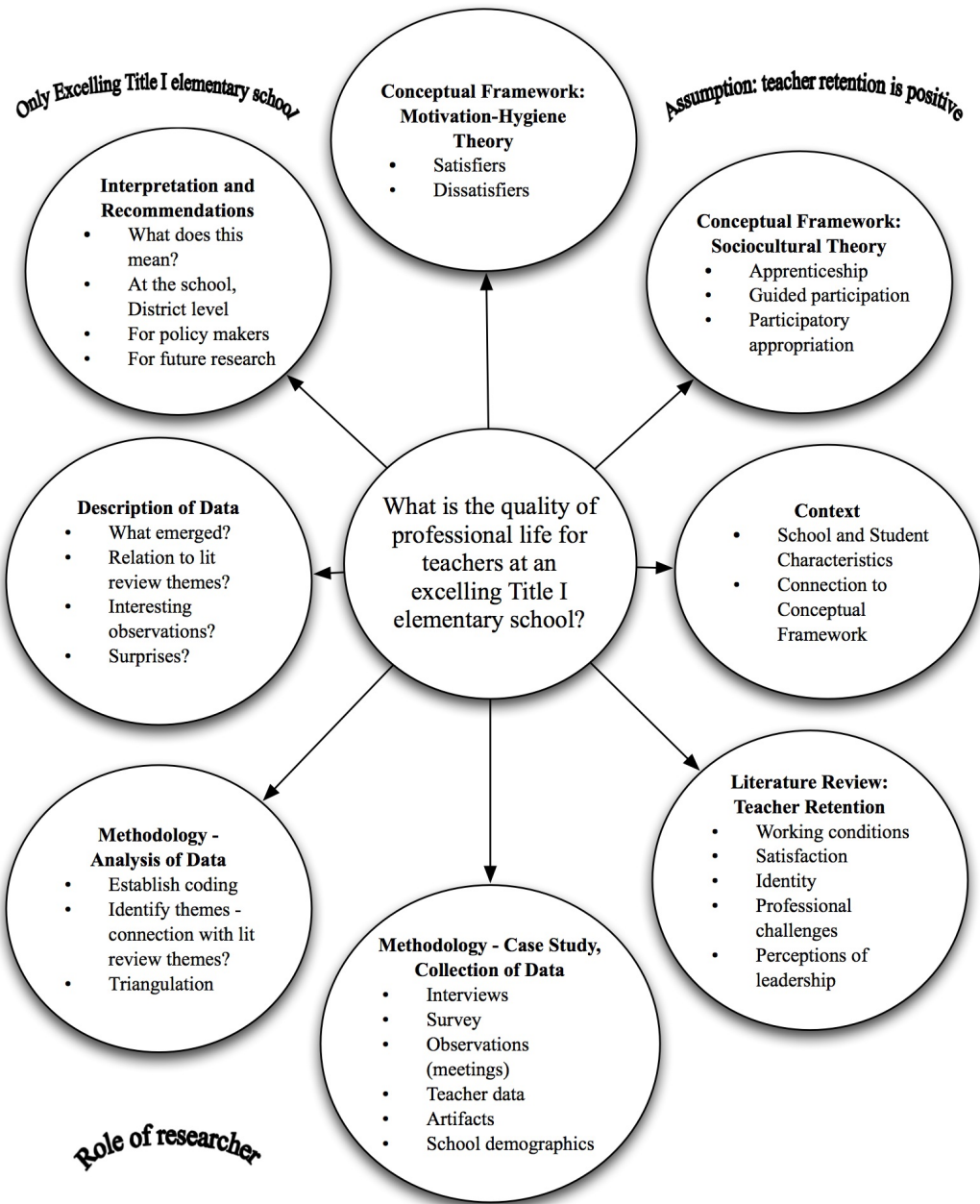


Figure 1. Concept Diagram

## **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study is to describe the quality of professional life of teachers in an excelling Title I school in the Seneca School District (a pseudonym). Quality of life may influence teacher retention. The factors impacting teacher retention are generally consistent and widely supported by research (Ingersoll, 2001, 2002; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). By understanding the impact of working conditions and the quality of professional life for teachers, schools and administrators may have more information that could influence decisions in implementing effective strategies for retaining quality teachers.

Through this study I will examine what factors influence the quality of professional life for teachers. The body of research describes teacher turnover as having a significant impact for staffing in urban schools (Ingersoll, 2001, 2002; Liu; 2007; Liu & Meyer; 2005). Yet, this same body of research appears to have overlooked quality of professional life for teachers as a significant component of teacher turnover and dissatisfaction. Other factors such as school or administrator support, type of students and teacher salary have been identified as contributing to teacher turnover. At Seneca Elementary School, teacher turnover is minimal, especially in the grade level classes (no turnover in grades pre kindergarten through 6th grade from spring of 2010 to the fall of 2010, and 4.3% from the spring of 2009 to the fall of 2009). This turnover rate compares favorably to national trends of 13.2% annually (Ingersoll, 2001). As a measure of turnover, the school has experienced a low teacher turnover rate over the last three years. This

rate compares favorably to the turnover rate for the entire Seneca School District, which consistently has a turnover rate between 7 and 10 percent.<sup>1</sup> As a result, teacher stability suggests a different approach regarding examining the teacher community at Seneca.

For this descriptive study, several facets of Seneca Elementary School will be examined. First, I will examine general background information about the school and its staff. This information may include review of the school's academic history as it relates to student achievement. For each of the previous eight years the school has received the state's highest ranking of student achievement. By understanding the student achievement profiles, a context for the study may be established. Second, I will gather artifacts that may provide insight into the professional lives of teachers. In the Seneca School District all schools produce and implement a school improvement plan (SIP) that establishes the focus for student achievement for the academic year. A variety of artifacts and documents relate to the SIP and student achievement. Third, I will gather data in the field, which will include interviews of teachers and administrators, observations and a survey. Through careful analysis, I hope to identify any characteristics or patterns from the data that may help illuminate the factors that make up the quality of professional life for Seneca's teachers. What appears to be missing is research describing the quality of professional life for teachers in a

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<sup>1</sup> Turnover data gathered from the Seneca School District Human Resources Department.

Title I school that is rated as excelling. This case study will focus on the examination of a particular school, Seneca Elementary School and its teachers.

Reviewing some of the ordinary components of the school may provide some indication of the school environment. How do teachers communicate with each other? What is the general professional attitude of teachers? How do teachers work within the school? Are teachers collaborative or are they isolated? What professional knowledge do teachers possess? In my role as assistant superintendent, I examine the working environments of employees on a regular basis to ensure efficacy for our students. In this study, my perspective will shift from evaluative to descriptive. Through this observational vantage point, a clearer picture may emerge regarding what the quality of life may reveal at Seneca Elementary School. In my professional capacity, I spend very little time addressing employment or teacher performance issues at Seneca that would lead me to believe that quality of life was a concern within the school. For human resource work, indicators of a school with difficulty include low teacher morale, poor working conditions and challenging relationships, which generally translate into employee complaints, parental complaints and high teacher turnover. From Seneca, very few issues like these ever reach my desk. I describe the lack of contact to the district office typically as good news. What I do not hear from schools is an indicator of efficacy for students. By looking at this school, a clearer understanding of the dynamics of a particular school may be of interest,

especially as student achievement continues to be the primary instructional and political focus in our current school environments.

### **Statement of Problem**

Through this study I will examine the quality of professional life for teachers. Specifically, what is the quality of professional life for teachers at one Excelling Title I school? By examining the teachers and their quality of life, I hope to understand teachers at Seneca and how they describe their quality of professional life (working conditions). Have the teachers and principal at Seneca Elementary School performed at a very high level as indicated by the quality of student achievement at the school? Although all of the Title I schools within the Seneca School District achieve above the state standards as measured by Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS), only Seneca Elementary School has achieved the highest ranking, Excelling. This ranking goes to less than 14% of all schools within the state (272 schools qualified as Excelling, out of 1944 schools eligible from student achievement data administered in April, 2010).<sup>2</sup> By this measure, Seneca has been a successful school for the last eight years since the inception of school labels.

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<sup>2</sup> Retrieved Oct. 17, 2010 from the Arizona Department of Education web page, <http://www.ade.state.az.us/>

## **Limitations**

### **Role of the Researcher**

My position as Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources may produce some limitations. Although I have assumptions regarding what factors influence the academic success of students at Seneca, it is important that this study describes the factors that impact the quality of professional life as they are revealed through the research, independent of any assumptions I have.

Teachers and other staff members may be reticent to provide their actual thoughts and opinions when answering questions from surveys and interviews. Some individuals may also provide answers or responses that they believe the researcher may want to hear due to the professional role as an assistant superintendent. There may also be a fear of retribution should any of the information provided be deemed as unfavorable by the participants. I believe that I have built effective and positive relationships with many staff members at Seneca over the last several years. These relationships have been built on ethical behavior on behalf of the staff at Seneca, and their interaction with me. I also believe that I maintain a high level of integrity in my position due to the very public nature of my position and the culture within the Seneca School District.

### **Access to Employee Information**

I have access to all personnel records of employees, which could add to the potential level of mistrust that employees could have through this research process. I will guard against the misuse of any background information available

to me regarding employees by limiting my access to the department resources and strictly performing all data analysis without any utilization of other employees within the Human Resources Department. In addition, all information from the participants shall be masked by using pseudonyms, and will be reviewed through member checking with those individuals who participate in interviews or other activities.

### **Conflict of Interest**

I will provide access to other Human Resources employees for the participants who participate in the study by declaring a conflict of interest should the participants find themselves dealing with employment issues that would otherwise involve me professionally in the future. This will be done as a matter of course to protect the employees. I will continue to perform regular duties in relation to Seneca that will not have any adverse impact on participants as a result of this study. These activities are consistent with the activities that I perform with all schools, including supporting teachers and administrators and providing staffing and other resources for schools.

### **Delimitations**

This study will be conducted at a Title I elementary school described as a suburban school due to its geographic location. The population at Seneca can best be described as mixed, with nearly 50% of its students identified as free or reduced lunch. The data collection and findings may or may not lend themselves to the applicability to other schools and districts. Additionally, the focus on

teacher retention by the Human Resources Department in the Seneca School District may not be universal for other school districts. At the time of the study, a changing national focus from the previous administration and *No Child Left Behind* to a move toward *Race to the Top* with the current administration under President Obama may indicate changing attitudes toward accountability and student achievement. These conditions may or may not be relevant to other schools based upon student characteristics, rates of poverty, and student achievement. In addition, the current financial environment may or may not have impacted how the participants may respond to the questions posed with this study.

1. Financial impact to school budgets. As a result of the economic downturn, the Seneca Unified School District made cuts to its maintenance and operations budget over the last three budget cycles. These reductions came in the form of reduced supply budgets, reduction of teacher staffing for elementary special area teachers (art, music, band, strings, and physical education), increased class size and other reductions that impact schools.<sup>3</sup>
2. Stagnation of teacher salaries. A second impact of the economic downturn involves salary stagnation for teachers. In the Seneca

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<sup>3</sup> Budget reductions by the Arizona Legislature for the 2009-2010 fiscal year resulted in a mid-year reduction of \$2.3 million from the Seneca School District. This reduction came in the form of reduced funding for maintenance of school facilities. Budget reductions for the 2010-2011 fiscal year included cumulative cuts of \$11 million from the District maintenance and operations budget. One result of the cuts was an increase in class size by an average of four students per class over the last two years.



School District, teachers have not seen salary increases since the 2007-2008 school year. Through its work with the Seneca Education Association, the local teachers' union, district administrators found creative ways to minimize the impact on teacher salaries. One provision of teacher salaries in Arizona, the Classroom Site Fund, saw a significant reduction over the last two years. This portion of teacher salaries is based upon revenues generated by a one cent sales tax passed by voters in 2000. Over the last two years, this fund decrease resulted in a 6% reduction of funds for base teacher salaries. The Seneca School District committed to making up these funds and the net impact has been no reduction in teacher base pay. However, the only significant increase in teacher pay was for teachers who completed professional development or advanced degrees.<sup>4</sup>

3. Reduction in Force. During the spring of 2009, the District reduced its teaching staff by 50 teaching positions. A second Reduction in Force occurred during the spring of 2010, which resulted in the reduction of an additional 100 positions. Although very few teachers were impacted at Seneca Elementary School, it is difficult to determine if the layoffs would influence the results of the study. Ingersoll (2001) accounted for determination of teacher turnover by excluding turnover

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<sup>4</sup> Of the 1700 teachers in the Seneca School District, fewer than 400 teachers received this additional compensation. The majority of teachers have seen a total of .5% compensation increases since 2008.

not attributed to voluntary reasons. This type of examination could be beneficial to the case study of Seneca Elementary School.

Although the findings from this study will be based particularly upon Seneca Elementary School, they may or may not lend themselves to identified themes generalized as a result of the study. If the themes appear to be clear and resonate with the research identified in the literature review of this study, there may be some applicability beyond Seneca Elementary School and the Seneca School District.

### **Significance of the Study**

The study should provide guidance to district level administrators, school level administrators and policy makers for continued support for effective schools. By examining Seneca, I hope to learn what influences the quality of professional life for teachers. Although I am unclear if a relation between quality of life for teachers and student achievement exists, I believe that examining schools that demonstrate success can strengthen the body of research for urban schools, especially schools that have consistently exhibited high levels of achievement over time. I have already identified one area that may emerge as a possible contributor to the success of Seneca Elementary School based upon teacher retention data that the Seneca Unified School District maintains in its Human Resources department. Another factor identified is the quality of school leadership. The current principal has been in the position for three years, and served an additional ten years as the assistant principal in the same school. The

previous principal served in the position for eleven years. This stability and efficacy are assumed to be important components of the school's success and influential in determining factors that comprise the quality of professional life for teachers.

### **For Teachers**

By understanding the components of the professional lives of teachers, we may be able to identify the attitudes and behaviors of the Seneca teachers and leaders, and how they contribute to the success of their students. Although I do not know the factors that contribute to teacher quality of life at Seneca, I believe that student achievement contributes in some way to the low level of teacher turnover, and conversely, low teacher turnover influences high levels of student achievement. Another factor that may influence responses regarding the quality of professional life for teachers may include interaction with parents. Often parents in the more affluent schools within the Seneca District interact frequently with teachers and other staff members, are active within the school community and may be described as "helicopter parents." At Seneca, there may be the same or different perceptions of parental involvement and how it impacts teachers. The study may also reveal if teachers who are more connected and engaged in their professional learning community with a quality of professional life generally described as positive, would have a greater impact on student achievement by having a higher degree of ownership and commitment to students. By focusing on what a highly achieving Title I school renders regarding the quality of

professional life for teachers, characteristics could be examined on how they may influence other urban schools that have not yet overcome the variety of challenges they face, and including low levels of student achievement.

### **For School Administrators**

By identifying what characteristics at an excelling Title I school comprise teacher quality of professional life, a knowledge base should emerge. Very few Title I schools have high levels of student achievement as measured by standardized tests in the state of Arizona. Through this study specific factors that describe the quality of professional life of teachers will be identified. These factors may provide guidance to the Seneca School District regarding its desire to have nine of its Title I schools obtain the excelling label (the tenth school is an alternative school and as such cannot achieve excelling as determined by the formula to assess student achievement). Further, the factors that impact teacher quality of life can be examined in other schools and districts in Arizona and across the nation based upon the data gathered from this study. The common factors regarding teacher retention have been identified consistently through the literature review. If differences or unique responses are identified regarding teacher quality of life at Seneca Elementary, some aspects of the study may influence decisions that principals make that positively impact the quality of professional life for teachers.

### **For District Administrators**

By understanding what patterns emerge regarding teachers and their quality of professional life at Seneca Elementary School, district administrators can better understand principal leadership and the school working conditions that impact teacher retention. Closely connected with the characteristics of teacher retention, identifying what teachers may say for leaving a teaching assignment at Seneca School is of equal importance. As two parts of the retention equation, why teachers stay at Seneca and why teachers leave Seneca, a more complete picture may emerge that can guide policy-making decisions regarding teachers. Examples could include changes in seniority designation, reshaping transfer and assignment guidelines and full implementation of mentor programs specifically designed for teachers in urban schools.

### **For Policy Makers (School Boards and State Legislatures)**

By understanding what factors contribute to the description of quality of professional life for teachers, policy makers may choose to establish specific guidelines at the local and state level that address the factors that impact teacher retention. Policy alignment should occur between the state and school districts, establishing a conducive environment for teacher retention in schools with high poverty and minority populations. For school districts, this is critical when addressing staffing. Individual school differences and teacher attrition at any particular school creates a ripple effect for staffing decisions at all schools. Effective and stable staffing is paramount to student achievement. Examples may

include specific benefits for teachers in urban schools, with a focus on professional community engagement, greater incentives to teach with populations of students identified as under-served and contractual benefits that could include deliberate changes to improve teacher working conditions.

Based upon the study findings, recommendations could be made regarding teacher quality of life in urban schools. Most notably, quality of professional life could relate to teacher retention. Quality of life may lead to greater connection with the school community and their professional identities as teachers. Teachers have a significant impact with students and parents when they are fully engaged not just as teachers, but as community members, activists and leaders. This connection allows educators to use the bully pulpit of their position to impact societal change. According to the National Education Association (NEA), a clear measure of this efficacy is the value of a teacher's vote. NEA has stated that teachers have a profound impact on voting and influencing others in the community (Flannery & Kopkowski, 2008). Educators are generally perceived positively by the community. This perception could foster greater involvement in the community and a strengthened connection in urban schools, paving the way toward greater societal change and improving the education of urban students. In the Seneca School District, this connection consistently plays out with the successful passage of local initiatives that support schools. As an example, in 2008, voters in the Seneca School District approved by a nearly three to one margin the continuation of an override for kindergarten through third grade for the

purpose of reducing class size and maintaining full day kindergarten, and the passage of a capital override, valued at nearly \$70 million over its lifetime for the infusion of technology in all classrooms in the District. This support indicates what can happen when a community supports education. Support for these types of initiatives demonstrates areas that impact teacher workload and working conditions, which most likely influence quality of life for teachers.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented an introduction to the study and an overview of describing the quality of professional life of teachers at Seneca Elementary School. The significance of the study may have implications for school and district administrators as well as policy makers for continued examination of the characteristics of successful Title I schools and the teachers and leaders within these schools. In Chapter 2 a conceptual framework based upon motivation-hygiene theory and socio cultural theory and the subsequent literature review framing teacher retention are presented. Chapter 3 describes the methodology of the study, including background information on the school, information on participants selected for interviews and how previous surveys gathered regarding working conditions will be examined. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study in detail, aligned with the themes identified in the literature review in Chapter 2, along with additional themes that emerged as a result of the study. Chapter 5 presents a summary of the study, its findings and recommendations and implications.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Motivation-Hygiene Theory**

What motivates employees in their jobs is critical to success in the workplace. How motivation impacts teachers in particular cannot be overlooked regarding its impact on perceptions of quality of professional life. Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman determined that what satisfies employees in the workplace is not the mirror image of what dissatisfies employees (1993). The lack of alignment of opposites established the foundation for the motivation-hygiene theory. According to Herzberg, "The opposite of job satisfaction is not job dissatisfaction but, rather *no* job satisfaction; and similarly, the opposite of job dissatisfaction is not job satisfaction, but *no* job dissatisfaction" (2008, p. 22).

#### **Job Satisfaction**

The belief that job satisfaction is an important factor in a successful organization is considered common knowledge by most people who have ever held a job. Herzberg contends that job satisfaction is more related to an individual's sense of efficacy and meaning within the job as opposed to external factors (1993, 2008). Herzberg et al. found that 1) achievement, 2) recognition, 3) the work itself, and 4) responsibility surfaced as the most influential factors for job satisfaction, greater than factors such as working conditions, status or interpersonal relations (1993). They further concluded that these factors had sustainability for workers within the work environment when experienced over



time; "A feeling that you have achieved and a feeling that you have been recognized are the two most frequent feelings that are associated with an increase in job satisfaction" (Herzberg et al., 1993, p. 67).

### **Job Dissatisfaction**

In their studies, Herzberg et al. found a different set of relationships for factors associated with job dissatisfaction. They identified the notion of unfairness as the strongest factor related to job dissatisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1993). Other dissatisfiers related to perceptions of a lack of the ability to grow professionally, and unhappiness with wages. Dissatisfiers then could lead to the types of attitudes and behaviors that would indicate some challenges that are not being addressed in the workplace. As this applies to teachers, the satisfiers and dissatisfiers emerged in a variety of areas in the literature review. In the spring of 2010, the Seneca School District conducted exit surveys of its employees, and found the results of the 49 teacher respondents consistent with the theoretical construct of Herzberg, that the dissatisfiers were not mirror images of the satisfiers. The majority of the teachers who completed the survey did so for retirement, and of those that left for other reasons, only three identified dissatisfiers as the reason.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Exit survey conducted between May 1, 2010 and May 31, 2010 through the Seneca Human Resources Department, available at [http://www.surveymonkey.com/sr.aspx?sm=KgYDW77\\_2bZFaFQmUDLYtI25sxw\\_2frlmGgH5mMECKr8z1w\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/sr.aspx?sm=KgYDW77_2bZFaFQmUDLYtI25sxw_2frlmGgH5mMECKr8z1w_3d)

## **Socio Cultural Theory**

Teachers work in social settings. Each day teachers spend several hours with students, and often connect with other adults (other teachers and employees, parents, administrators) during the school day. Yet sometimes teachers are unable to interact with other teachers in a meaningful professional way. Socio historical theory (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986) and the different components of adult experience and learning (Rogoff, 2003) suggest that adult learning is a mediated activity. Vygotsky described mediation as an interactive part of the learning process where there is an indirect connection to learning versus a direct or stimulus response connection to human behavior (1978). In the educational setting, mediated activities occur on a daily basis within the classroom and as part of the interaction of adults. Rogoff categorizes this learning for adults into three areas: 1) apprenticeship, 2) guided participation, and 3) participatory appropriation (1995). Adult learning is a foundational premise of teacher preparation programs and is embodied in a variety of approaches, including student teaching and internships. In general, teacher education programs require teacher candidates to gain experience within classrooms before they receive degrees and credentials for teaching. Experienced teachers, however, have few systematic opportunities for their continued professional development that are predicated upon mediated experiences and adult learning. Licensure requirements fail to take into account the impact of shared professional experiences and adult learning within

professional learning communities (PLCs) as key components of teacher professional development.

DuFour identified behavioral characteristics that principals should demonstrate in order to lead teachers in professional learning communities (1999). The recent emphasis many school districts are placing on PLCs indicates a shift for teachers. As an example, in the Seneca School District all teachers are required by contract to perform 36 hours of time supporting activities for PLCs.<sup>6</sup> Although PLCs are now part of the changing landscape in education, it is unclear if PLCs effectively support these mediated forms of adult learning. This study will approach the behavior of teachers as they relate to one another in the context of professionals. The nature of a professional learning community may be found in both structured (PLCs) and unstructured activities within the school setting. As a result, I am interested in the behaviors of teachers and a sense of the professional teacher community as well as the structures that may be in place as integral components of the quality of professional life for teachers.

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<sup>6</sup> Arizona law requires school districts to adopt changes to pay for performance plans through a two part approval process; 1) 70% of teachers must approve the changes to the plan; 2) the plan must be adopted in an open meeting of the school district's Governing Board - Arizona Revised Statutes §15-977, retrieved from <http://www.azleg.gov/FormatDocument.asp?inDoc=/ars/15/00977.htm&Title=15&DocType=ARS>. Seneca teachers and Governing Board approved the plan prior to the 2010-2011 contract year.

## **Apprenticeship**

Often teachers learn in models where the veteran teacher works in conjunction with the novice teacher, either through the student teaching model or some other design of apprentice and master. In describing apprenticeship, Rogoff stated, "Apprenticeship as a concept goes far beyond expert-novice dyads; it focuses on a system of interpersonal involvements and arrangements in which people engage in culturally organized activity in which apprentices become more responsible participants" (1995, p. 143). In schools, we often have apprenticeship models that are based upon years of experience, but few apprenticeship models recognize the knowledge and expertise of teachers that may be new to the profession or to a particular school.

Another approach involves the relationships between mentors and those they mentor, protégés. Clifford and Green noted the qualities and characteristics of mentors in relationship with their protégés may not be clearly defined in the literature (1996). Learning in the mentor-protégé relates to the Zone of Proximal Development (Clifford and Green 1996; Vygotsky 1978). The relationship of mentor and protégé by definition often has the mentor viewed as the expert and the protégé as the novice. Although learning generally occurs in this relationship, the mediated experience often is one-sided (Rogoff, 2003).

## **Guided Participation**

In schools, however, teachers might not find mentors due to the demographics of the teaching staff. Rogoff indicates that with guided

participation, "...people manage their own and others' roles, and structure situations..." (1995, p. 147). Guided participation is a concept which involves people ... "as they communicate and coordinate efforts while participating in culturally valued activity" (Rogoff, 1995, p. 142). Guided participation places teachers in behavior roles where each individual is expected to follow a specific path or outcome. For teachers, an example would be a meeting where teachers have a pre set agenda and one teacher may lead or direct the meeting with a specified outcome at the end. Other teachers would follow their directed course of responsibilities or activities. In a variety of situations teachers may in fact rely on each other for efficacy such as curriculum mapping or lesson planning. "Their activity is directed, not random or without purpose; understanding the purposes involved in shared endeavors is an essential aspect of the analysis of guided participation" (Rogoff, 1995, p. 148). Guided participation may occur within an entire school community including parents (Matusov & Rogoff, 2002).

### **Participatory Appropriation**

Teachers are social by nature but often work in environments that are isolated. The structure of elementary school classrooms often have a single teacher working with students throughout the school day. The only interaction between the teacher and other adults may be at lunch or during some planning time, but usually by accident and not in a planned or meaningful way. Street suggested that teaching was social practice, especially in the context of mentoring (2004). Street found that dialogue mediated learning and effective interaction

between the mentor and protégé, and that to the teachers, "It was the specific social relationships with mentors that mattered most to these new teachers" (2004, p. 22). In order for teachers to make meaning of their learning and transfer their learning into classrooms as instructional activities, they follow the concept of participatory appropriation. "The concept of *participatory appropriation* refers to how individuals change through their involvement in one or another activity, in process becoming prepared for subsequent involvement related activities" (Rogoff, 1995, p. 142). The impact on teachers as a community of learners is most apparent when the individual demonstrates behavioral change as a result of socially mediated activity. This mediated activity connects with the concept of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998, 2006). According to Wenger, "Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly." Gee contends that the strength of an organization lies within the community of practice itself; "The knowledge is *in* the community of practice, which 'belongs' to the company, not the individual" (1999).

For the purpose of this study, I have defined the informal structures of teacher community as a community of practice, and the formal structure of teacher community as professional learning communities. Due to the nature of the teaching population at Seneca, with few novice teachers (teachers with less than three years teaching experience), participatory appropriation would be the most likely lens to view the adult learning taking place. Through this lens I

anticipate that the teacher community at Seneca will provide insight into how teachers engage professionally with colleagues, parents, and with the school administration. Does a community of practice exist at Seneca Elementary School? What are the teachers' perceptions as they relate to their working conditions? What is the experience of teachers at Seneca that shapes the quality of professional life for teachers?

### **Literature Selection and Review Process**

The literature review and selection process consisted of three steps. First, I completed multiple searches through ERIC<sup>7</sup> and related research databases. Keywords included teacher retention, teacher attrition, professional learning communities, teacher communities and social networks of teachers. I conducted additional searches by authors based upon expertise in the field and review of references in some of the selected studies. The majority of the sources span the time period from 1996-2010, with some of the citations for the conceptual framework and the introduction section of the study from the mid 1970's, establishing a context for the study. Second, I identified key concepts that emerged from the literature review. These concepts were aligned with the implications for adult learning as identified in the conceptual framework to verify the appropriateness of use within this study. Many studies did not have specific conceptual frameworks identified, but the findings of the studies related to the identified themes that emerged as a result of the literature review. Third, I

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<sup>7</sup> Education Resources Information Center (see <http://www.eric.ed.gov/>).

categorized the themes into distinct categories based upon findings in the body of research and several recommendations identified in the research, and my own interpretation of the themes as they related to the research question and the conceptual framework. The starting point for the literature review focused on studies as they related to teacher retention. I chose this approach based upon data from the Seneca Unified School District Human Resources Department which has a long-standing focus on teacher retention as one of its primary goals. Due to my role as the Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources in the Seneca Unified School District, teacher retention is a primary focus of my professional responsibilities. In addition, a community advisory group to the superintendent made teacher and administrator quality a focus in its recommendations and identified retention as the desired outcome for quality employees<sup>8</sup>. This set of recommendations influenced recruitment and retention strategies of the Seneca Human Resources Department over the last four years.

### **Definitions**

I have provided the following definitions as a clarification of terms:

*Satisfier* – a person's overall attitude of the job that contributes to a positive feeling about the job (Herzberg et al., 1993).

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<sup>8</sup> The Superintendent's Blue Ribbon Advisory Committee (BRAC) identified teacher and administrator quality as recommendations to the Governing Board for areas of focus in 2007. These recommendations influenced the recruitment and retention focus for the Human Resources Department in the Seneca School District



*Dissatisfier* – components of a person's job that an employee does not like that contribute to a negative feeling about the job (Herzberg et al., 1993).

*Leavers* – teachers who exit the profession.

*Stayers* – teachers who remain in a particular school or teaching assignment.

*Movers* – teachers who transfer to a different school.

*Professional Learning Community (PLC)* – teams of teachers that meet on a regular basis to collaborate for the purposes of learning, joint lesson planning, and problem solving.<sup>9</sup>

*Community of Practice* – an informal structure of teachers "who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (Wenger 2006, p. 1).

*Retention* – when employees return to the school from the previous contract year.

*Attrition* – when teaching positions are vacated at a school through resignation, retirement, transfer or termination or a full year leave of absence. Attrition results in the total number of teaching positions at a school that need to be filled for the entire contract year.

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<sup>9</sup> As defined by the Seneca School District, retrieved from [http://plc.susd.curriculum.schoolfusion.us/modules/groups/integrated\\_home.phtml?gid=1501483&sessionid=553ed217b2ddf09f22f912c51576f9d1](http://plc.susd.curriculum.schoolfusion.us/modules/groups/integrated_home.phtml?gid=1501483&sessionid=553ed217b2ddf09f22f912c51576f9d1)

*Turnover* – includes teachers who resign or transfer to a different school.

Turnover does not include teachers who may be on a leave of absence for a period of time but then return to their positions.

Each definition is based upon discussion and review of the literature, combined with previous definitions and clarifications contained in empirical studies (Freedman & Appleman 2008; Ingersoll, 2001, 2002; Olsen & Anderson, 2007; Swars, Meyers, Lydia & Lack, 2009).

### **Literature Review and Emerging Themes**

Through the literature review, several themes emerged regarding the quality of professional life for teachers and related to teacher retention in urban schools; 1) working conditions, 2) teacher satisfaction, 3) teacher professional identity 4) professional challenges, and 5) perceptions of teacher leadership. Freedman and Appleman described six factors that contributed to teacher retention; a sense of mission, disposition of hard work and persistence, substantive academic and practical preparation, training to be a reflective practitioner, opportunity to transfer schools, and ongoing support from other professionals (2009). According to Liu and Meyer, teacher compensation and student discipline problems had a significant impact on teacher attitudes and retention (2005). Elfers, Plecki and Knapp intimated that teacher retention was largely a school problem as determined by factors at the school level as compared to district or state factors (2006). Olsen and Anderson found three factors that influenced teacher retention; 1) overwhelming workload during the first year of

teaching; 2) stayers (teachers continuing in the same work assignment) took on fewer roles to balance workload; 3) shifters (defined as teachers who left the profession but were still committed to education in some form) desired to return to higher education or graduate school (2007). Strunk and Robinson were unable to suggest a single factor for teacher retention but concluded that teachers who had professional opportunities outside of teaching were more likely to leave the profession (2006).

### **Working Conditions**

A variety of studies indicated the importance of positive working conditions for teachers as a key factor in retention (Stotko, Ingram & Beaty-O'Ferrall, 2007; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Olsen & Anderson, 2004). Stotko et al. defined working conditions to include principal leadership, environment, opportunity for teacher input and some control over curriculum and instruction (2007). Strunk and Robinson (2006) suggested that working conditions were difficult to quantify, but included, "...measures of the racial makeup of the student body and teaching staff, poverty, and the urban environment of a school" (p. 71). Liu and Meyer included work conditions as one of the five variables that impact teacher perceptions and their jobs (2005). According to Stotko et al. (2007), good working conditions had a positive impact on teacher attendance. I examined several components as they influenced teacher perception of working conditions and have broken these into a) principal leadership, b) environment, c) teacher input, and d) teacher control over curriculum and instruction.

Working conditions were essentially ignored in several of the schools involved in the study conducted by Olsen and Anderson (2004). The leavers in the study maintained a perception of a workplace that exhibited a culture lacking interest in attracting and retaining teachers for long-term employment (Olsen & Anderson, 2004). Teachers consistently responded that high poverty schools were far more likely to have unfavorable working conditions that were more likely to impact their decisions to leave their schools (Elfers et al., 2006). They found, however, that “teachers in low-poverty schools are more likely to see leadership support as a compelling reason to stay” (2006, p. 122).

### **Principal Leadership**

Research on principal leadership concluded that principals impact student achievement and the success of schools (Nettles & Herrington, 2007). Principals, by the nature of their position, almost always worked as teachers prior to becoming principals. This change from teacher to administrator often creates an expectation from teachers that principals conduct themselves in a particular way that demonstrates empathy and support for teachers. Olsen and Anderson found that many teachers valued supportive school administrators (2007). Leavers cited the lack of supportive principals as a contributing factor for their decision to leave the profession (Olsen & Anderson, 2007). Swars et al. reported that 51% of teachers surveyed indicated effective relationships with school administrators contributed to reasons teachers stayed at their school (2009). In the same study, teachers also identified that leadership styles of principals impacted decisions for

teachers to transfer or resign, citing poor communication skills, and top-down leadership styles as characteristics that did not support a positive working environment (Swars et al., 2009). When school leadership encourages teacher involvement in governance, school leaders and teachers are actively improving the working conditions for teachers (Liu & Meyer, 2005). This connection between teachers and their administrators positively impacted how teachers perceived their working conditions. In a study of the retention of science teachers in urban high schools, Moscovici (2009) reported that a perception of lack of power for teachers increased the likelihood of looking for other employment.

### **Environment**

School environments provide a meaningful gauge on teacher perceptions of working conditions (Cannata, 2007; Clayton & Schoonmaker, 2007; Collinson, 2004; Elfers et al., 2006). School environments consist of more than the physical building. Elfers et al. (2006) found that school culture was related to decisions teachers made to stay in their particular schools. In my professional role as assistant superintendent, I see a variety of factors that relate to school environment. One component of an effective school environment considers the professional relationships between teachers (Street, 2004). Multiple studies revealed the importance of professional relationships between mentor teachers and novices as factors that influenced the school climate (Clayton & Schoonmaker, 2007; Freedman & Appleman, 2008, 2009; Liu 2007; Liu & Meyer, 2005; Olsen & Anderson, 2007). Matusov and Rogoff described the

relationship in a mentoring capacity as one that mediates the learning between the newcomers and experienced individuals (2002). A gap in the research demonstrates a need to examine the perception teachers have of school environments and how the professional relationships between experienced teachers influence a positive school environment.

### **Teacher Input**

Teachers value a working environment that allows input into decision-making processes within schools (Freedman & Appleman, 2008, 2009; Ingersoll, 2001, 2002; Kearney, 2008; Moscovici, 2009; Olsen & Anderson, 2007). For some teachers, input equated to autonomy (Olsen & Anderson, 2007) and may be an important factor in teacher retention. Bradley and Loadman alluded to the importance of listening to teacher opinions as a key starting point in retention and recruitment (2005). Stotko et al. intimated that urban schools have less autonomy for teachers and greater bureaucratic requirements (2007). Olsen and Anderson reported that teachers who described their working assignments as less desirable noted that more autonomy would impact a teacher's decision not to seek a different teaching assignment in another school (2007). Autonomy also related to decisions regarding finances. Cannata reported, "Teachers in charter schools that have control over their own budget reported greater levels of teacher professional community than teachers that do not have this level of autonomy" (2007, p. 21). One example cited for the lack of any autonomy at all related to an instance where a teacher had to seek permission from the assistant principal to change the seating

arrangement in the classroom and concluded that this type of environment contributed to teacher attrition (Clayton & Schoonmaker, 2007).

In a study of retention of African-American teachers in urban schools, Kearney found that autonomy and control in the classroom were highly valued at the elementary and high school levels (2008). Moscovici examined the power relationships between teachers and others that impacted their perception of efficacy (2009). She noted that as teachers' perception of personal efficacy, power and control diminished, their desire to stay in the profession was negatively impacted (Moscovici, 2009). A similar phenomenon emerged for teachers who began to exercise their collective power by believing they had input into decision-making. Freedman and Appleman (2009) noted that some teachers felt repercussions for voicing opinions and concerns. As a result of their collective advocacy that challenged some of the traditional decisions and structures in schools, several teachers were not rehired by the District the following year (Freedman & Appleman, 2009). Swars et al. concluded, "Fear associated with expressing concerns to administrators and feelings of disempowerment were sentiments expressed as rationales for considering leaving" (2009). They linked input from teachers as part of establishing a trusting school environment in which teachers had some control over professional decisions (Swars et al., 2009).

### **Teacher Control Over Curriculum and Instruction**

Several studies supported teacher perceptions of decisions regarding curriculum and instruction as warranting teacher input (Moscovici, 2009; Stotko

et al., 2007; Swars et al., 2009). When teachers and administrators had different views of curriculum or school policies or practices, Swars et al. described the phenomenon as “spheres of mismatch” (2009 p. 174). These “mismatches” often included instruction and curriculum where teachers felt disempowered from making professional decisions (2009). Moscovici (2009) expanded the sphere of mismatch to include establishing a shared and cohesive vision of science education that is aligned with education policy (p. 101). Science teacher interns shared perceptions of frustration that related to a lack of control over curriculum and instruction (Moscovici, 2009). Teacher control over teaching techniques emerged as a factor in school environments that influenced teachers’ plans to stay (Stotko et al., 2007). They suggested that “increased sharing of instructional and curricular control with teachers” should be considered as part of the solution to addressing teacher attraction and retention in urban schools (2007, p. 47). Smith and Ingersoll noted that collaboration on instruction and curriculum with other teachers impacted teacher perception on retention (2004). Teachers find themselves within the educational environment at a time when "...the field of education is displaying just such a divide in arguments over pedagogy and curricula" (Gee, 1999, p. 67). Their influence of curriculum and instructional decisions allows some control over their professional lives (Moscovici, 2009).

### **Teacher Satisfaction**

Several studies concluded that teacher satisfaction is measurable (Bradley & Loadman, 2005; Freedman & Appleman, 2009; Liu & Meyer, 2005;



Moscovici, 2009). Elfers et al. considered a variety of factors that impact teacher retention and concluded that no single factor dominated teacher attrition as it related to teacher satisfaction (2006). Teacher retention was predicated upon the satisfaction of teachers (Stotko et al., 2007). Bradley & Loadman described teacher satisfaction as having social and practical factors (2005). Teachers who experience efficacy in the classroom tend to be more satisfied (Bradley & Loadman, 2005). I have examined teacher satisfaction within a) social factors; and b) practical factors.

### **Social Factors**

I have included relationships with students, teachers and principals as impacting social factors. Teacher satisfaction and workload may be less of a factor for experienced teachers due to the nature of developing relationships as teachers become more experienced. The difference in perspective alludes to the impact of workload on teachers new to the profession (Olsen & Anderson, 2007, p. 15), “most [new teachers] also reported feeling overwhelmed and unprepared during their 1<sup>st</sup> year in the classroom...” Smith & Ingersoll noted a lower level of teacher satisfaction and an increased risk of teacher turnover in schools with higher levels of poverty (2004). Kearney concluded that student motivation to learn was another important influence on teacher satisfaction (2008); the more teachers saw their students as motivated, the more they were satisfied with their work. Teachers who believed their students were highly motivated modeled empowering behavior for student learning. “The best teachers...motivate students

to become actively involved in the learning process” (Bradley & Loadman, 2005, p. 12). Olsen and Anderson identified the desire to have a greater community impact and leadership opportunities as factors contributing to teacher satisfaction (2007).

Teacher support is another indicator of teacher satisfaction and a contributing social factor. When teachers feel they are supported by colleagues and the principal, they reflect positively on their experience (Moscovici, 2009). Support from the principal influenced teachers' decision to stay (Elfers et al., 2006). The relational needs of teachers and the ability of principals to meet these needs impacted teachers' desire to stay at their particular school and contributed to teachers being less likely to transfer to another school or leave the profession of teaching (Swars et al., 2009). Teachers often placed the need for support on the principal (Elfers et al., 2006; Swars et al., 2009). In a case study of teachers described as academically able, Clayton and Schoonmaker found that support in the areas of collaborating with peers, a sense of belonging to the profession, engaging in leadership activities and fostering supportive school culture were factors that influenced the retention of teachers (2007). Teacher support may be influenced by the relationship that teachers have with one another. Street concluded that new teachers held the relationship with their mentors and the environment of the school as important factors (2004). Ingersoll concluded that the key factor influencing teachers leaving the profession lay in the relatively low social status of teachers in relation to other professions (2005).

How teachers work with other teachers is an aspect of social factors. Park, Henkin & Egley described teacher and team commitment as an important component of teacher efficacy (2005). Teachers who worked in the same school for more than eight years demonstrated a higher level of team commitment (Park, Henkin & Egley, 2005). They defined teamwork as "...cooperative behaviors of team members to achieve desired goals, and is characterized by a number of behavioral indicators such as communication, team orientation, team leadership, monitoring, feedback, backup behavior, and coordination" (Park et al., 2005, p. 466). "When teachers do not trust each other, they are not likely to collaborate" (Park et al., 2005, p. 466). Freedman & Appleman concluded that ongoing support from colleagues and members of the same graduate school cohort influenced teacher retention (2008). Similarly, Vaught found that the importance of relationships with other teachers was a primary motivator for veteran teachers to volunteer to work with novices (2010).

### **Practical Factors**

Teachers generally described practical factors for support as knowing how a school functions, what the policies and procedures are and how teachers new to a building navigate the basics within a school. Kearney (2008) listed salary, benefits, opportunity for professional advancement and safety of the school environment as practical factors that influenced teacher satisfaction. Olsen and Anderson described the concern that teachers had regarding paying off student loans as having an impact on the decision for a teacher to consider leaving the

profession (2007). Stotko et al. described district policies, union contracts and seniority policies as areas that served as disincentives for attraction and retention in urban schools (2007). As teachers considered their future and possible leadership, Cooley and Shen concluded that location and salary were considerations for career advancement for teachers who considered entering into school administration (1999). Bradley and Loadman noted that teachers saw salaries as an important practical factor for retention, but ironically did not identify salary as an extrinsic factor for themselves as individuals (2005, p. 18). Liu and Meyer identified compensation as one of five key areas related to teacher retention and satisfaction, "Low compensation was found to be the leading cause of teachers' unhappiness about their profession," (2005, p.997). Mismanagement of teachers, including low pay, ineffective recruitment strategies and poor retention served as barriers to teacher retention (Ingersoll, 2005). These findings are consistent with Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory and that the dissatisfiers are not mirror images of the satisfiers (1993).

### **Teacher Professional Identity**

Wenger established a framework for professional identity that includes the individual and the collective (1998). He asserts that professional identity has several characteristics: negotiated experience, community membership, learning trajectory, nexus of multimembership, and as "a relation between the local and the global" (Wenger, 1998, p. 149). For teachers this means that within their working environments their professional identity may be framed by their personal and

professional experiences and how these experiences constitute part of their quality of professional life. Wenger further contends that identity and practice are “mirror images of each other” (1998, p. 149). In addition, Wenger argues that in communities of practice, learning is a key component of identity (1998). For teachers whose professional foundation and purpose is learning, the depth of learning as part of professional identity extends far beyond their professional beliefs. This identity for many teachers is a core value with deep meaning (Clayton & Schoonmaker, 2007; Duncan-Andrade, 2004; Freedman & Appleman, 2008). For many teachers this depth of identity frames who they are as people. Fullan asserts that the teaching profession has a moral purpose and, "The profession as a whole believes this [95% or more of students can become proficient at higher-order 21<sup>st</sup> century skills], not just because they value it [success], but because it [the profession] is committed to and knows that it can deliver on it" (2010, p. 90).

Teacher identity is also related to teacher satisfaction and retention (Freedman & Appleman, 2008). As teacher identities emerge, a sense of belonging and efficacy are framed by the teacher’s experiences prior to entering the profession. This experience contributed to a higher retention rate for teachers in structured mentor programs (Freedman & Appleman, 2008). Duncan-Andrade suggested that teachers may actually lose identity if they become more dependent upon district-level professional development which may contribute to attrition (2004). Teacher identity may also be a function of teacher control and autonomy

as connected with professional development (Duncan-Andrade, 2004; Bradley & Loadman, 2005). Vaught described teacher identity in the context of veteran teachers serving as mentors for new teachers (2010). Teachers defined their identity related to a belief that teaching was an inherent profession (a calling, like the priesthood), teacher professionalism was a life long endeavor, that teacher professionalism was complicated and multi-faceted, and that working with students was extremely important to teacher professionalism (Vaught, 2010). Vaught based her categorization of teacher identity on Gee's Four Ways to View Identity (2000-2001). Gee described the identities as Nature-identity, Institution-identity, Discourse-identity and Affinity-identity. His argument is that identity is complex, and that each of the four ways of viewing identity is often dependent upon the other three views simultaneously. Gee further contends that much of what we see visibly with identity is through affinity-identity, that is what causes people to be linked with one-another as a like group. Affinity groups would include teachers as a profession, and would relate to the teachers at Seneca as being identified through their institution identity at the same time (Gee, 2000-2001).

Teacher identity may be overlooked by the practical factors that influence teachers. When teachers are concerned with salary, workload and other issues, they may lose sight of their professional focus. For most teachers, entering the profession has deep meaning and commitment (Freedman & Appleman, 2008; Olsen, 2008). Olsen connected teacher identity to role models for teachers as they

grew up, compatibility with teaching, love of the content, affinity for working with children and a belief in social justice (2008). The strong connection to core values suggests that teachers perceive their profession as a social calling (Clayton & Schoonmaker, 2007). Freedman and Appleman (2008) found that teachers who experienced success and stayed in the profession described an identity that demonstrated alignment with the profession of teaching and a strong sense of social justice. They further described teachers who left the profession as having less congruence with personal beliefs and the profession (Freedman & Appleman, 2008).

### **Professional Challenges**

The challenges that teachers face in urban schools are significant (Sachs, 2004). Olsen and Anderson contended that teachers leave when they do not feel supported by administrators or connected with colleagues (2007). Smith and Ingersoll further concluded that the rate of teacher turnover was substantially reduced by having a mentor (2004). Elfers et al. did not find any single factor to be the reason teachers leave (2006), but rather factors such as transfer and assignment impacted retention in combination with one another. The difference in perception of veteran teachers and novice teachers indicated that veterans were more likely to stay based upon understanding personnel policies and their impact (Elfers et al., 2006). I have examined professional challenges through a) student characteristics and b) socio-cultural awareness of teachers.

## **Student Characteristics**

Characteristics of students impact teacher retention. Several studies indicated that student composition by race and levels of poverty impacted teacher retention (Ingersoll, 2001, 2002; Strunk & Robinson, 2006). Schools had a greater level of new teachers leaving when they had higher levels of poverty (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Strunk & Robinson, 2006). Strunk and Robinson (2006) also concluded that teachers with one to four years of experience were more likely to leave schools serving these student populations. Novice teachers (one to three years in the profession) were more likely to change school teaching assignments (Elfers et al., 2006), especially in schools with higher poverty levels and higher percentages of African-American students. These schools generally are connected with federal programs, including schools with Title I grants. One of the consequences to student characteristics is the number of teachers who were teaching outside of their area of certification or expertise (Ingersoll, 2005).

Student discipline influences teachers' perception of support (Liu & Meyer, 2005; Strunk & Robinson, 2006; Lipman, 1997). Discipline issues generally are complex, but may be viewed as the result of students viewed through a deficit model (Lipman, 1997). Liu and Meyer concluded that student discipline followed compensation as the primary reason for teacher dissatisfaction (2005). They suggested that teachers who stayed had, "...a slightly more positive perception of student behavior than leavers" (Liu & Meyer, 2005, p. 998). They stipulated, however, that a lack of training could be the key factor contributing to



dissatisfaction with student discipline (Liu & Meyer, 2005). Ingersoll considered student discipline problems as a leading contributor to teacher attrition (2002).

### **Social Cultural Awareness of Teachers**

Olsen and Anderson addressed teacher preparation at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) as an example of teacher preparation that went beyond straight pedagogy. They noted the program included “...sociocultural learning approaches, and moral-political dimensions of teaching” (Olsen & Anderson, 2007, p. 7). Lee described the importance of "Cultural Modeling" as a critical factor for teachers to be successful in urban schools (2007, p. 26). Stotko et al. noted that many traditional teacher candidates would not choose to teach or be successful teaching in inner-city schools (2007), and also need to be able to build relationships with students. According to Sachs, socio-cultural awareness surfaced as an important factor in predicting teacher success in urban schools (2004). Sachs did not conclude, however, that a difference existed between the characteristics of teachers and their efficacy with students, instead concluding that the attributes may be a measure of “...resilience rather than their effectiveness” (2004, p. 184).

### **Perceptions of Teacher Leadership**

Schools typically view leadership as being a function of the principal. Depending upon the nature of the school, the type of community, the demographics and the quality of teachers, principals could be performing vastly different tasks and responsibilities. The perception of leadership and teachers

could signify what types of teacher behaviors exist at a particular school. One definition of teacher leadership stated, "...teachers are leaders when they function in professional learning communities to affect student learning; contribute to school improvement; inspire excellence in practice; and empower stakeholders to participate in educational improvement" (Childs-Bowen, Moller & Scrivner, 2000 from SERV<sup>10</sup>). By applying this definition, examples of teacher leadership included involvement in extracurricular activities, membership in professional organizations and engagement in peer leadership (Collinson, 2004).

### **Distributed Leadership**

How teachers perceive themselves regarding leadership may be a function of the type of leadership evident within the school setting. Spillane, Diamond and Jita stated that, "school leadership is best understood as a distributed practice, *stretched over* the school's social and situational contexts" (2003, p. 535).

Distributed leadership in schools may show aspects of a distributive nature based upon the types of artifacts and tools utilized by teachers and others who share the distributed power of the school (Spillane et al., 2003). The main contention of this research and the term 'stretched' is that "...distribution of leadership involves a consideration of how leadership tasks are co-enacted by two or more leaders working together or independently" (Spillane et al., 2003, p. 538). Teacher leadership extended beyond the classroom and into the components of school that

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<sup>10</sup> Developing a shared definition of teacher leadership. Symposium conducted at the meeting of the SERV Teacher of the Year Advisory Committee, Cullowhee, N.C., October 1999.

involve planning, analysis and design. Distributed leadership should, however, demonstrate a leadership practice as opposed to a leadership role (Harris & Spillane, 2008). If teachers do not have meaningful responsibility, distributed leadership may not produce any significant impact or change (Harris & Spillane, 2008).

### **Learner Centered Leadership**

Lieberman, Falk and Alexander defined learner centered leadership (LCL) as "...focusing on meeting the needs of learners in school organization, governance, curriculum, and teaching" (2007, p. 24). The definition followed their review of schools in New York City that were part of the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE). Through interviews and observations they found that schools that demonstrated LCL for the CCE schools had consistent core values; all children have the capacity to learn, honoring diversity, providing for the needs of the 'whole child,' student assessments in support of meaningful teaching and learning, viewing everyone as a learner and engaging as a democratic learning community (Lieberman et al., 2007). Whalstrom and Lewis found that sharing leadership with non administrators influenced the long-term efforts of teachers to improve instruction (2008). These characteristics may exist within the school environment at Seneca. Danzig, Borman, Jones and Wright suggested that for LCL, learning should not only be for individuals but also for the organization itself (2007). If a collective belief of LCL is part of teacher

perceptions of leadership, a description of these characteristics would emerge at Seneca Elementary School.

### **Chapter Summary**

Throughout the review of the literature, it became clear that until there is a better understanding within individual schools of why teachers make decisions to stay or leave, the instability of the teaching staff will continue to be a challenge. What a quality of professional life examination reveals may tell us more about what influences teachers and their attitudes at Seneca. Motivation-hygiene theory identifies the concept of satisfiers and dissatisfiers having separate components. How teachers work with one another exemplifies the impact of adult relationships in the workplace under the premise of socio cultural theory. The literature review revealed five themes that impact teacher quality of life and retention; 1) working conditions, 2) teacher satisfaction, 3) teacher professional identity 4) professional challenges, and 5) perceptions of teacher leadership.

Too often the examination of teacher attrition focuses upon schools that have poor student achievement, serve students of poverty, and that are viewed as serving students through a deficit model (Kozol, 2005). By examining Seneca Elementary School, I deliberately negate the perception of students in urban schools as falling under a deficit model. This point is evident with Lee, as shown with the connection of the Cultural Modeling Project and the demonstration of the relationship Lee developed with students (2007). Further, I want to examine the professional behaviors and actions of teachers at Seneca Elementary School. The

research question is what is the quality of professional life for teachers at an  
excelling Title I elementary school?

CHAPTER 3  
METHODOLOGY

**Case Study**

I proposed a case study that included a variety of components for collection of data. These components included; 1) interviews with selected teachers, 2) interviews with the current principal and former principal, 3) a brief written survey for teachers (Appendix A) and 4) Other field observations which might entail examination of teacher and school environment by observing team meetings, faculty meetings and conducting focus groups, and review of school and District documents. This approach took into account various characteristics suggested by Stake (2010) and Rossman and Rallis (2003). The description of teacher interviews and observations followed Stake's description of a qualitative story (2010).

**Teacher Interviews**

A purposeful sampling of teachers to gauge teacher attitudes and perceptions was conducted for this study (Seidman, 2006). A total of 12 teachers from Seneca Elementary School were selected to participate in the interviews. Teachers selected included at least two teachers who have taught at Seneca for at least five years, and at least two teachers who have transferred to Seneca within the past two years. The rest of the sampling included diversity by teaching assignment, responsibilities and overall teaching experience. Each interview looked for teacher perceptions on working conditions, quality of professional life,

and to what degree teachers are actively engaged in school professional community activities. The interviews would look for teacher responses that could influence factors that contribute to the school label through Arizona Learns. Would teachers in the only Title I school with an excelling label have responses that indicated attitudes that influence the school and student achievement? How would these teachers perceive their work assignment and connections with their professional learning community? What would emerge as the primary components that describe the quality of professional life of teachers at Seneca? The interviews would probe the attitudes and beliefs of teachers and how they described their quality of professional life and what components comprised their perceptions, especially in the context of student achievement. I expected to learn what it means for teachers to be part of the staff at Seneca, and how they perceived instruction and the label of “Excelling.” Although there might have been reticence to speak freely with me from some participants, I believe that the relationship I have built with school staff minimized the impact with the study. Further, I provided opportunity to modify the interview structures to allow time for participants to become familiar and confident with the processes outlined with the gathering of data for the study.

### **Interview Structure**

Each interview was conducted on site within the school setting. Interviews occurred within a 90 minute framework, based upon Seidman's three part interview process, modified for a single interview session if necessary

(2006). The participants were asked about: 1) their professional background, including key influences in selecting education as a profession; 2) What influenced their decision to work with the student population at Seneca; 3) their current experiences at Seneca. For some, this included queries regarding their individual participation in the organizing activities during the school closure conversations of the spring of 2008<sup>11</sup>; and 4) reflections of their experiences and how they have applied these reflections to their current educational practices (Appendix B). The questions were posed in an open-ended format, allowing each participant maximum opportunity to engage in deep reflection. A limitation may have been the nature of the questions as open-ended. Teachers may have provided information that would suggest a desire to tell the researcher what they assume is what the researcher wants to hear as opposed to a genuine description of the school environment for teachers. Another limitation may have been the perception the participants have of the researcher. In my role as assistant superintendent, I have responsibility over employees. By triangulating the data I was able to examine the components that comprise the quality of professional lives of teachers at Seneca.

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<sup>11</sup> The Seneca District considered closing Seneca elementary school during the fall of 2008 as a cost-saving measure. Significant community participation and organizing influenced the Governing Board to remove its consideration from the table. Many teachers were actively engaged in the community organizing efforts.



## **Data Gathering and Analysis**

The interviews were audio-recorded and professionally transcribed. Upon completion of the interviews and transcription, the interview data was analyzed to determine what phenomena may exist that describe components of the quality of professional life for teachers, (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The data was scanned and a search for possible themes completed, with the intent of providing specific data analysis of the responses, similar to the methodology utilized by Espinoza-Herold (2003) and McCarty (2002). In addition, the interviews would be analyzed for development of a profile of each of the teachers interviewed. The profiles were further analyzed into their common components (Seidman 2006).

Research indicates that teachers are most likely to leave the profession within the first five years of teaching as a result of a variety of variables (Ingersoll, 2001, 2002). This attrition rate is identified as 13.2% annually (Ingersoll, 2001). Based upon the demographic data of Seneca Elementary School, teachers with less than three years of experience and teachers with more than five years of experience would be most likely to leave Seneca. However, the demographics at Seneca suggest that a purposeful sampling of teachers would be the most effective sampling for interviews due to the small number of teachers with less than three years of experience. Teachers with more than three years of experience could provide relevant information regarding the decisions they have made to stay at Seneca as indicated by how they describe their quality of life.

## Teacher Survey

In 2007, a report titled, “Stemming the Tide of Teacher Attrition: *How Working Conditions Influence Teacher Career Intentions and Other Key Outcomes in Arizona*” summarized the findings from the Teacher Working Conditions Survey conducted statewide during the spring of 2007<sup>12</sup>. The survey, conducted by a coalition of educators, educational organizations, policy makers and the previous governor, sought to gather data to address teacher turnover in the state. In their report, Berry, Fuller & Williams concluded that five domains shaped the general findings of the survey; 1) Leadership, 2) Empowerment, 3) Time, 4) Facilities and Resources, and 5) Professional Development (2007). Although these themes vary somewhat from the themes identified in the literature review, they relate to components that would comprise the quality of life descriptors anticipated through the teacher interviews. Berry et al. further concluded that a discrepancy exists between teacher perceptions and principal perceptions of these domains (2007). The survey included a sample of nearly 32,000 teachers from over 200 school districts in Arizona. The Seneca School District participated, along with Seneca Elementary School.

I conducted a brief written survey with open ended questions for the participant teachers at Seneca Elementary School (Appendix A). I then examined the survey responses to see what information these surveys brought to light. I anticipated interesting data to emerge. Specifically, I hoped to describe the

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<sup>12</sup> Teacher Working Conditions Survey (<http://www.aztwc.org/>)

factors that comprise the working lives of teachers at Seneca Elementary School. What patterns emerged that may tell a story of what influences Seneca elementary teachers in their beliefs? The survey was given to selected current teaching staff at Seneca on a voluntary basis. Responses were anonymous, with the utmost care to protect teacher confidentiality (Appendix C).

### **Chapter Summary**

I have outlined the methodology for this study. As a case study, the data to be gathered included 1) interviews with selected teachers, 2) interviews with the current principal and former principal, 3) interviews with teachers who have transferred from Seneca, 4) a brief survey for teachers, and 4) other field observations such as observation of team meetings and faculty meetings, data gathered from focus groups and review of identified school and district documents. The data was triangulated to determine what factors comprise the quality of professional lives for teachers at Seneca Elementary School.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS AND RESULTS

#### **Introduction**

In this section I will review the context of Seneca as a Title I school, with a description of the characteristics of the student population, the school's history, connection to parents and the community and the school's instructional focus. I also paint a portrait of the participants of the study, and the relationship between the theoretical framework and the data recorded through the study, including the interviews, survey and other observations. The data and analysis of the quality of professional life present a compelling picture of what an excelling Title I school means for teachers and the school community at Seneca. The findings and results are presented by starting with an understanding of the context of Seneca as an "excelling" Title I elementary school. The context includes understanding of the criteria that causes a school to be designated as a Title I school, characteristics of the student population, the history of the school and the possibility of the school being closed during the 2008-2009 school year. Next, I discuss the sample of individuals included in the study and some demographic information. Through the section of findings and results, I illustrate the findings as they related to the identified themes in chapter 2 under the main theme categories; 1) working conditions, 2) teacher satisfaction, 3) teacher professional identity, 4) professional challenges and 5) perceptions of leadership. Analytic methods and coding schemes illustrate how I categorize and interpret the data. Finally, I address

themes that did not align with specific categories from the literature review but instead are themes established that made sense regarding cross categorization of data and observations as they emerged when gathering the data.

### **Context of an Excelling Title I School**

The United States Department of Education determines that a school may become a school wide Title I program with a student population of 40% or greater identified as poor children.<sup>13</sup> This designation provides eligibility for federal funding for the purpose of improving student achievement and providing additional services for students to meet academic standards, most notably in the core content areas of math and reading. Seneca's designation as a school wide Title I program means that it accepts the designated federal funding and has a school wide program designed to support additional academic achievement. For Seneca, this support means one full-time teacher working as an instructional coach and one full-time reading specialist. Seneca also has other support based upon its student population, including support for students identified as gifted, special education and English Language Learners (ELL). Seneca also has support from the district community schools program which includes half of a teaching position for pre-school students and before and after school programs for child care.

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<sup>13</sup> Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/index.html>  
United States Department of Education, Title I, Part A.

## **Characteristics of the Student Population**

Seneca Elementary School had a student enrollment of 694 students during the fall of 2010. The total number of students identified as qualifying for free and reduced lunch as determined by the Federal Government for 2010 increased to 51%, demonstrative of the continued increase in student poverty from 2007 to 2010. This trend is related to the overall socio-economic standing of the community and has been influenced by the recession that began in 2007. Like most of Arizona, the economic impact in the attendance area that serves Seneca has been significant.

Seneca also serves a population of ELL students. In 2000, Arizona passed legislation which eliminated bilingual education as one approach to language acquisition to non-native English speakers by passing Proposition 203.<sup>14</sup> These students receive mandated services as delineated by the Arizona Department of Education that require either a concentrated four hour block of English only instruction labeled English Language Development (ELD), or may be provided services through an Independent Language Learner Plan (ILLP), pulling students for targeted individual instruction. In the Seneca School District, funding for these positions is paid through local tax revenues from Desegregation Funds as a result of a Civil Rights Consent Decree reached during the 1980's to provide appropriate

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<sup>14</sup> Text of the proposition downloaded from <http://www.azsos.gov/election/2000/info/PubPamphlet/english/prop203.htm> Arizona Secretary of State Archives.

and equitable resources to non-native English speakers.<sup>15</sup> For Seneca Elementary School, this funding provides for three and a half teachers who teach an identified population of 55 ELL students currently in the program. The majority of these students declare Spanish as their primary language, with an identified population of 85 students who declare Spanish as the home language. Other home languages of ELL students include Albanian, Arabic, Farsi, French, German, Hindi, Navajo, Punjabi, Romanian, Serbian, Thai, Tagalog, Vietnamese and one unidentified Indian language for some Asian students. In addition, the school serves a population of Native American students who attend from a nearby reservation. With over 100 students who have languages other than English spoken primarily at home, the school has seen nearly half of its students either qualify to exit the ELL or ILLP program by demonstrating proficiency as identified by the Arizona English Language Learner Assessment (AZELLA)<sup>16</sup> utilized per the direction of the Arizona Department of Education, or that parents chose to deny services and instead chose a regular classroom setting for their child.

### **History of Seneca Elementary School**

Seneca first opened in 1959, serving the neighborhood as a kindergarten through eighth grade school. In the mid 1980s, the school configuration changed to an elementary school, kindergarten through 6th grade. This is its current

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<sup>15</sup> Arizona State Senate Issue Brief, Aug. 27, 2008 downloaded from <http://www.azleg.state.az.us/briefs/Senate/SCHOOL%20DESEGREGATION%20IN%20ARIZONA.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Available at <http://www.ade.state.az.us/OELAS/>

configuration. The area surrounding Seneca is predominantly single family homes, most built between 1950 and 1965 in an area that grew rapidly as part of the growth of population in the Western United States that continues today and is projected into the future. For most of its history, Seneca has served a predominantly middle class set of families, the majority identified as Anglo/white. Over the last twenty years, the neighborhoods around Seneca have experienced a demographic shift. This shift includes a significant increase in families of poverty, increases in the number of students identified as ELL, some economic decline due to increased retail vacancies in neighboring shopping centers, closing of an area shopping mall, and the subsequent focus on redevelopment as directed by the city government. Over the last eight years, Seneca has been named as an excelling school, the highest achievement label a school can be given by the Arizona Department of Education.

### **School Consolidation and Closure**

During the 2007-2008 school year, the Seneca School District began to face budget challenges, mostly due to stagnation of funding as provided by the state legislature. As a result of an assessment of school facilities and an external demographic study, the District determined that one cost saving measure would be to consider the possible consolidation of schools by closing some schools that may be under utilized or well below identified student capacity. Seneca Elementary School had been identified as a possible candidate for consolidation, mostly due to its geographic proximity to two other elementary schools with



lower student populations as a percentage of capacity. Closing Seneca, along with several other options, were presented to the Governing Board for consideration. A grass roots campaign within the community to prevent the school from being closed emerged, titled "Seneca Rocks." The campaign had broad support from the staff at Seneca. Throughout the community, yard signs sprung up, employees and parents wore t-shirts, and a well-executed effort to organize resulted in the possible closure of Seneca being removed for consideration by the Governing Board in the spring of 2008. According to one of the teachers, the consideration to close Seneca was "A slap in the face. It meant that we put in all of this effort, and, for nothing." One of the outcomes of the organizing effort was an increase in the student population from 630 students in 2008 to its current population of 694 students.

### **Staff Stability and Teacher Turnover**

Seneca is a school that has low teacher turnover. As an illustration, all but one of the core classroom teachers (kindergarten through 6th grade) have taught at Seneca for 2009-2010 and the current year, 2010-2011. Attrition at Seneca over the last three contract years has been as a result of two teacher deaths (October 2008, January 2011), one resignation due to allegations of unprofessional conduct (PE), one administrative transfer of an ELL support teaching position, one ELL support teaching position reduction in force and two retirements (band teacher, nurse), and one resignation in January, 2011 of teacher

in a special education autism classroom due to challenges regarding job duties in special education and family commitments out of state (Table 1).

Table 1

*Teacher and Staff Assignments at Seneca and Turnover Rates from 2008-2011*

2010-2011	2009-2010	2008-2009
At Seneca previous year	41	38
Teachers new to Seneca from previous year	6	7
Percentage stability in core content area (K-6)	95%	95%
Percentage Stability in art, music, band, PE, library	86%	86%
Percentage stability in special education	71%	71%
Total staff stability	87%	84%

In addition, during the same time period, two special education positions and an instructional coach position were added to the school. In my role as Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources and working closely with the principal, each of the cases involving staff turnover beyond retirement, death and reduction in force, was the result of the principal maintaining high standards for students and staff and being relentless in her focus on the curricular program at Seneca. Therefore, teachers that left Seneca did so at the urging of the principal with my support in the role of Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources. Teacher turnover at Seneca is concentrated in the area of special education,

reflective of the impact of teacher retention and student characteristics (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Strunk & Robinson, 2006). As a result of this dynamic, the ability to garner a perspective of former teachers at Seneca was not practical for the study.

### **Sample**

The study involved a total of 21 participants, including the current principal, assistant principal, psychologist, a variety of teachers, the principal's secretary, two parents (husband and wife) and the former principal as delineated in Table 2. All individuals volunteered to be part of the study. For the written survey,  $n=12$ . For the teacher interviews,  $n=12$ . Additionally, the principal's secretary, the current principal, the former principal and husband and wife agreed to be interviewed in an unstructured format with open ended questions taken from the teacher interview questions and modified as suited for the participants who were not teachers. Most of the interviews were digitally recorded with the exception of the interviews with the parents and the former principal. Other interviews or observations were described with field notes.

The teachers represented an acceptable cross-section of teachers at Seneca (Table 3). Three 2nd grade teachers, two 3rd grade teachers, two 4th grade teachers, and one 5th grade teacher, the instructional coach, the art teacher, the vocal music teacher, a learning resource teacher from special education and the Title I reading specialist participated in the interviews and/or completed the survey (Table 3). The sample did not include any kindergarten, first grade or

sixth grade teachers. The lack of participation by these groups may be viewed as a limit to the validity of the data in the study. The triangulation done by observations, analysis of artifacts, and interviews with non-teachers account for accuracy in the data presented by teachers through the interviews and minimize any gaps in data that may have resulted by not interviewing kindergarten, first or sixth grade teachers. By interviewing the principal and former principal, school leadership perspectives were gained regarding the quality of professional life for teachers. In addition, the perspectives of parents and the principal's secretary provided another vantage point for review of the data.

Table 2

*Participants in the Study*

Participant pseudonym	Teaching assignment or other role	Interviewed <i>n</i> =15	Observed <i>n</i> =11	Surveyed <i>n</i> =12
Karen	Principal	Yes	Yes	No
Nina	Assistant principal	No	Yes	No
Ron	Psychologist	No	Yes	No
Pat	2nd grade	Yes	No	Yes
Mimi	2nd grade	No	No	Yes
Claire	2nd grade	Yes	No	Yes
George	3rd grade	Yes	Yes	Yes
Jody	3rd grade	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lisa	4th grade	Yes	No	Yes
Luanne	4th grade	Yes	No	No
Bob	5th grade	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sharon	Title I reading specialist	Yes	Yes	Yes
Francisca	Instructional coach	Yes	Yes	Yes
Carolyn	K-6 visual arts	Yes	No	Yes
Susan	Vocal music	Yes	No	Yes
Denise	Learning resource (special education)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Colleen	English language development	No	Yes	No
Theresa	Principal's secretary	Yes	Yes	No
Matt	Parent	Yes	No	No
Grace	Parent	Yes	No	No
Craig	Former principal	Yes	No	No

Table 3

*Demographic Information of Interview Participants*

Pseudonym	Teaching Assignment	Gender	Race	Years of Experience with District	Total Years of Experience
Francisca	Instructional Coach	Female	White	5	11
Pat	Teacher 02	Female	White	13	15
Claire	Teacher 02	Female	Hispanic	15	15
Jody	Teacher 03	Female	White	6	6
George	Teacher 03	Male	White	14	16
Luanne	Teacher 04	Female	White	12	12
Lisa	Teacher 04	Female	White	21	35
Bob	Teacher 05	Male	White	5	9
Carolyn	Teacher Art	Female	White	5	5
Susan	Teacher General Music	Female	White	15	20
Sharon	Title I Reading Specialist	Female	White	12	12
Denise	Teacher Special Ed Resource	Female	White	8	18

*Note.* The teachers interviewed for the survey are an experienced group of teachers, predominantly female and white.

### Findings and Results

The findings and results are presented by first defining quality of professional life. Second, I used the five themes identified in the literature review as a construct for analyzing the data. Third, the findings were broken into sub themes as they related to the research question, what is the quality of professional life for teachers at a Title I elementary school with a history of high levels of

student achievement? Finally, I addressed themes that were not specifically identified in the literature review but existed for teachers at Seneca Elementary School.

### **Quality of Professional Life Defined by Teachers**

Factors that influence teacher retention have been studied with consistency over the last several decades. For the purpose of this study, however, the research did not clearly identify quality of professional life, only the factors which influence retention, working conditions and perceptions of leadership (Freedman & Appleman 2008; Ingersoll, 2001, 2002; Olsen & Anderson, 2007; Swars, Meyers, Lydia & Lack, 2009). In relying on Herzberg's (1993) description of motivators (job factors) to frame quality of professional life for teachers, I concluded that teachers themselves should be asked what they believe quality of professional life means. Twelve teachers completed a brief written survey which asked three open ended questions (Appendix A). Question A asked teachers to define quality of professional life. The responses varied. Most of the responses focused on the definition as being related to working with other people. This is consistent with Gee's analysis of the "Social Turn" where he states, "The knowledge is *in* the community of practice, which 'belongs' to the company, not the individual," (1999, p.65). The definitions submitted by teachers indicated their sense of a community of practice as a key part of their quality of life as shown in Table 4.

Table 4

*Definition of Quality of Professional Life*

Participant pseudonym	2010-2011 Teaching assignment	Question A: I define the quality of professional life as
Pat	2	a daily effort with long-term planning.
Mimi	2	[a] balance between personal life and professional life.
Claire	2	[a] balance between work and home duties.
George	3	the availability of resources, time, and training provided to accomplish and understand implementation of site programs.
Jody	3	the setting of attainable goals and the hope that I will be able to achieve them.
Lisa	4	the atmosphere under which teachers do their work, how doing "the job" impacts professional/personal relationships, support that is essential for success, barriers to teachers feeling successful.
Bob	5	work[ing] in an environment where I am expected to meet the needs of my students, encouraged to reach personal goals, and given an opportunity to impact the community.
Francisca	Instructional coach	respecting one-another's professionalism and time, a safe environment.
Carolyn	K-6 Visual Arts	[a] feeling that I can perform to the best of my abilities with the resources available to me. This includes running my classroom and improving myself through further education.
Sharon	Reading Specialist, Title I	working with all the stakeholders (parents, administration, teachers, students, paraprofessionals) in a productive manner, providing the best instruction to my students maintaining the consistency and system of Seneca's core programs.
Susan	Vocal music K-6	interest and buy in to all programming that involves my school. This makes me feel that my program is valuable.
Denise	Learning resource K-3	having the correct supplies and programs to help students achieve to reach their goals.

One definition stated, "Interest and buy-in to all programming that involves my school. This makes me feel that my program is valuable." Three teachers cited a balance between personal and professional life as a definition. Lisa, a veteran teacher with over 35 years of experience, stated that quality of professional life for her meant, "The atmosphere under which teachers do their work, how doing 'the job' impacts professional/personal relationships, support that is essential for success, [removing] barriers to teachers feeling successful." Bob, an upper grade teacher who had previous experience in another state prior to arriving at Seneca several years ago, defined quality of professional life for him as, "Work[ing] in an environment where I am expected to meet the needs of my students, encouraged to reach personal goals, and given an opportunity to impact the community." This belief corresponded to his overall view of teaching that he shared in his interview. Francisca, an instructional coach, defined her quality of professional life as "respecting one-another's professionalism and time, a safe environment." In reviewing Rogoff's description of participatory appropriation (1995), the connection to adults learning together and in group settings emerged as part of the common definitions submitted by teachers.

By sorting through the responses and looking for commonality, I defined the quality of professional life as "factors that influence a view of teaching as a valuable endeavor that has a strong sense of purpose and fulfillment."



## Data Analysis

The data from the interviews and surveys was analyzed by utilizing Seidman's approach to interviews as a three part structure (2006). Interpretation follows several types of questions as listed by Seidman, including looking for patterns and connections (2006, p. 128-129). The themes and sub themes identified in the literature review were used as the coding system (Table 5).

Table 5

*Coding for Survey and Interview Responses*

Theme	Sub theme	Coding
Working conditions	principal leadership	1
	environment	2
	teacher input	3
	teacher control over curriculum and instruction	4
Teacher satisfaction	social factors	5
	practical factors	6
Teacher professional identity		7
Professional challenges	student characteristics	8
	socio-cultural awareness of teachers	9
Perceptions of teacher leadership	distributed leadership	10
	learner centered leadership	11

I then identified key words elicited from the surveys and the interviews and placed them into categories aligned with the themes from the literature review. Table 6 shows the key words were linked most closely with a single theme based upon context and meaning. Subsequently, each theme or sub theme was provided a numerical code based upon the content of the answer and the connection of key words to the sub theme. Codes were given positive (+) or negative (-) values based upon the individual subject's description as a satisfier (+) or a dissatisfier (-). Each question response was then analyzed into the themes delineated in the responses, with a significant number of responses having two or more themes represented. I made a determination based upon context with answers regarding the appropriate code. Some responses required extending context to other interview questions to code accurately.

I triangulated the data by following Stake's recommendations with qualitative data (2010). Through member checking, participants verified the accuracy of their statements and validated their remarks. The inclusion of the principal, former principal, parents and secretary lent themselves to different perspectives for the study. Finally, through field observations and examination of documents I provided an additional perspective for the study.

Table 6

*Key Words, Coding and Themes*

Theme	Sub-theme	Code		Key words
Working conditions	Principal leadership	1	principal assistant principal administration focus	core programs fidelity integrity
	Environment	2	time expectations focus consistent structured programs good/positive serious about learning	goals dynamic everyone reputation resentful vision successful
	Teacher input	3	district expectations discourage creativity involved dialogue sharing	collaboration brainstorm sounding board bounce ideas
	Teacher control over curriculum and instruction	4	district expectations discourage creativity teacher accountability	connect give up control
Teacher satisfaction	Social factors	5	group nasty we nice together staff human relationships stress us	our isolation work well together no whining camaraderie family community home friends happy teachers
	Practical factors	6	job responsibilities class size technology time policies	union well-oiled machine tired job security uncertainty - budget

Table 6, continued

Teacher professional identity		7	professionalism not as optimistic strict more human role life experiences parent volunteer taught teacher church	scouts sports synagogue camp counselor school board educator worked retail music background brag work really hard pride
Professional challenges	Student characteristics	8	one kid relationships parent involvement kids learn tutoring	caring strict believe in themselves great community neighborhood
	Socio-cultural awareness of teachers	9	life experiences baggage scruffy kids relate	socio economic standing (SES) low SES support for students diversity
Perceptions of leadership	Distributed leadership	10	group we together common	team trainer take responsibility check-in with one/another
	Learner centered leadership	11	learn from each other conference reflective life-long learner articulation benchmarks	achieve student accountability data assessments tests

## **Working Conditions**

Working conditions consists of sub themes a) principal leadership, b) environment, c) teacher input and d) teacher control over curriculum and instruction. Survey question B provided a framework for responses to participants in the interviews. Interview questions that resulted in high frequency responses for working conditions included questions 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 13 and 14 (Appendix B).

**Support for quality of professional life.** Question B on the survey asked the participants "The greatest support for quality of professional life is" as an open-ended question. Each response was coded based upon the content. Nine of the 12 respondents mentioned either administration or the principal and the support they felt they had as teachers (Table 7). By having such prominence with the respondents, the impact of working conditions and principal support became clear for the participants. Jody mentioned encouragement as a key factor, not punishment. This characteristic often is the ascribed to effective school leadership (Dufour, 1999, Harris & Spillane, 2008). She further mentioned "accountability plus assistance," again alluding to administrative support. Mimi, Claire, Sharon and Lisa all identified "administration support" as a primary factor for support for quality of professional life. Sharon also cited leadership from the administration as a supporting factor. Sharon used the words "cooperative, collaboration" and "consistency" in her definition. Susan identified "an administration that values every teacher on campus" as the primary supporting

Table 7

*Support for Quality of Professional Life*

Participant pseudonym	2010-2011 Teaching assignment	Question B: The greatest support for quality of professional life is
Pat	2	Our principal and assistant principal have always been the best!
Mimi	2	Administration support
Claire	2	Administration support
George	3	Administration understands staff needs and works to make the quality of life more efficient, but less stressful
Jody	3	Encouragement not punishment, accountability plus assistance, affirmation for success
Lisa	4	support from administration and fellow teaching staff
Bob	5	Staff dialogue to promote or recognize our successes
Francisca	Instructional coach	Our administration and teachers work together for a common goal. A team vs. administrators and teachers viewed separately
Carolyn	K-6 Visual Arts	I feel valued as part of Seneca's team. Fellow teachers seem to appreciate and value my program for much more than a planning period
Sharon	Reading Specialist, Title I	Cooperative efforts, collaboration, consistency, administrative support/leadership
Susan	Vocal music K-6	An administration that values every teacher on campus
Denise	Learning Resource K-3	Having resources available. I have been given tutors and volunteers to help me teach the students

factor of quality of professional life. George related a similar view, "administration understands staff needs, and works to make the quality of life more efficient, but less stressful." Pat stated, "Our principal and assistant principal have always been the best!" This finding is consistent with the literature review identifying the importance of principal leadership (Swars et al., 2009), and the connection to meeting the relational needs of teachers in the work environment. Throughout the interview responses, teachers described the principal's leadership style as distributed (Spillane, 2008). Several observations support this description and will be addressed later in this chapter. Six of the respondents mentioned fellow teachers and the professional relationships exhibited within the staff. This finding is addressed further within the section on teacher satisfaction.

One challenge for coding the responses to identifying the support for quality of professional life was defining the term "support." Throughout the interviews, teachers described administrative support in several ways. First, the most common references for administrative support regarded the professional relationships teachers felt existed between teachers and the administration, most notably the principal. These descriptions were generally dispersed throughout the interview responses. One example included a teacher who came to the school in large part due to having heard that the principal had a strong reputation as treating people well, and this description came out in her interview responses when she compared Seneca to other schools. Second, administrative support included

providing resources to teachers. An example included teachers being concerned with large class sizes. Wearing my hat as Assistant Superintendent, I worked with Karen to secure a resource teacher for the 1st, 2nd and 3rd grade teachers for reading support. The purpose of this support and the additional teacher was to alleviate some of the challenges associated with large class size and meeting individual learners' needs. Although this particular issue was not part of the study, the addition of a resource teacher was a clear example of administrative support. A third example included setting the stage for distributed leadership. Karen expected teachers to focus on student achievement but did not go so far as to tell teachers how to achieve this beyond the focus of the core curricular programs. This was evidenced by my observations with the 3rd grade professional learning community, my observation of the student conferences after writing day and my review of the 3rd grade PLC documents. Although the teachers had autonomy on how the learning activities were structured, they did not have the complete freedom to "close their doors and teach what they wanted."

**Barriers to quality of professional life.** Teachers responded with relative consistency regarding perceived barriers to quality of professional life. Seven of the 12 respondents to question B on the survey identified "district expectations" as a barrier to quality of professional life (Table 8). I coded this response in relation to working conditions as (3) – teacher input and (4) – teacher control over curriculum and instruction. Consistent with Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory, satisfiers (support for quality of professional life) and dissatisfiers



Table 8

*Barriers for Quality of Professional Life*

Participant pseudonym	2010-2011 Teaching assignment	Question C: The greatest barrier for quality of professional life is
Pat	2	District expectations
Mimi	2	Disconnect between what is expected to be done and what time permits, demands from numerous venues
Claire	2	The District expectations of what they want us to do in the classroom and what we can really do
George	3	Increase in class size, requirements to education/programs that either change from year to year or are replaced after short term use
Jody	3	Expectations that are imposed on the school from the District that are not directly related to student growth
Lisa	4	lack of time to do all we feel we need to do to meet the expectations
Bob	5	Job responsibilities that discourage teacher creativity
Francisca	Instructional coach	Not enough time
Carolyn	K-6 Visual Arts	Being a "singleton" makes it difficult to fit into an on site PLC, even though I work with music and PE, it is not the same as an all elementary "art" group sharing ideas and experiences
Sharon	Reading Specialist, Title I	Time, class size
Susan	Vocal music K-6	previous warring factions of teachers that worked for their own end and personal gain rather than for the good of the group
Denise	Learning Resource K-3	The home connection. I spoke to parents at the beginning of the year. I have not had parent interaction. I think this is an important part of student achievement.

(barriers to quality of professional life) were not identified by the participants as mirror opposites as shown in Table 9. When examining the support for quality of professional life, the majority of the participants identified principal leadership as a compelling factor.

Conversely, not a single participant identified lack of principal leadership or poor or ineffective principal leadership as a barrier to quality of professional life. The absence of a single citation to school leadership at the principal level as a barrier to quality of professional life indicates the importance of principal leadership on the quality of professional life for teachers. This finding is consistent with the literature review on principal leadership and retention of teachers (Elfers et al., 2006), and the reason teachers leave high poverty schools due to lack of administrative support as a dissatisfier (Ingersoll, 2002). The identification of lack of teacher input and control were consistent with Herzberg et al. and their contention that company policy and administration have a relation to dissatisfiers (1993). For this study, "district expectations" as listed by the participants are similar to company policy and administration as delineated by Herzberg et al. (1993). According to the sample of teachers, the greatest dissatisfiers, lack of teacher input (3) and lack of teacher control over curriculum and instruction (4), indicate that teacher perception and control appear to diverge where control is beyond the teacher and the classroom. This is most evident with

Table 9

*Comparison of Satisfiers and Dissatisfiers for Quality of Professional Life*

Participant pseudonym	Response coding for support for quality of professional life	Response coding to barriers to quality of professional life
Pat	1 – principal leadership	3 – teacher input 4 – teacher control over curriculum and instruction
Mimi	1 – principal leadership	2 – environment 3 – teacher input 4 – teacher control over curriculum and instruction
Claire	1 – principal leadership	3 – teacher input 4 – teacher control over curriculum and instruction
George	1 – principal leadership 2 – environment	3 – teacher input 4 – teacher control over curriculum and instruction
Jody	2 – environment	3 – teacher input 4 – teacher control over curriculum and instruction
Lisa	1 – principal leadership 5 – social factors	2 – environment 3 – teacher input 4 – teacher control over curriculum and instruction
Bob	5 – social factors	3 – teacher input 4 – teacher control over curriculum and instruction 6 – practical factors
Francisca	1 – principal leadership 5 – social factors 10 – distributed leadership 11 – learner centered leadership	2 – environment
Carolyn	5 – social factors 10 – distributed leadership 11 – learner centered leadership	5 – social factors
Sharon	1 – principal leadership 3 – teacher input 5 – social factors 9 – socio-cultural awareness of teachers	2 – environment 6 – practical factors
Susan	1 – principal leadership 5 – social factors	5 – social factors 10 – distributed leadership
Denise	1 – principal leadership 5 – social factors 6 – practical factors	8 – student characteristics

*Note.* Satisfiers – Job loading = practical factors, environment

Satisfiers – Job enrichment = principal leadership, distributed leadership, learner centered leadership, trust, focus on instructional leadership

Dissatisfiers – teacher input = company policies

Dissatisfiers – teacher control over curriculum and instruction = administrative practices

the terminology, "District, and District expectations." Jody felt strongly, "Expectations that are imposed on the school from the District that are not directly related to student growth."

Where teachers described the environment (2) as a contributing factor for quality of life (George and Jody), they did not respond with environment as a key dissatisfier, but instead were consistent with the majority of the participants who identified teacher input (3) and teacher control over curriculum and instruction (4) as the dissatisfiers. Teachers who identified environment as a dissatisfier, Lisa and Francisca, identified principal leadership (1) and social factors (5) among the satisfiers from question A. These responses demonstrated consistency with motivation-hygiene theory. Herzberg suggests that job loading and job enrichment motivate employees and serve as satisfiers (2003). Job loading and job enrichment can be viewed as teacher input and teacher control over curriculum and instruction within the school setting. According to the respondents, however, they described a lack of teacher input and lack of teacher control over curriculum and instruction as dissatisfiers. Lack of teacher input and lack of teacher control over curriculum and instruction are associated with company policies and administrative practices (Herzberg, et al., 1993, p. 113). The responses from teachers are consistent with motivation-hygiene theory.

**Principal leadership.** Although principal leadership was identified as a key factor supporting quality of professional life, when compared to the frequency of all of the sub theme responses, principal leadership was lower than teacher

professional identity, social factors, environment, and student characteristics (Table 10). Within the theme of working conditions, principal leadership had the second highest number of references with 41 responses throughout all of the questions of the teacher interviews. This suggests teachers identify principal leadership as an important supporting factor for quality of professional life but may not identify principal leadership as directly related to many of their daily concerns with teaching. The highest levels of frequency for principal leadership included question five, "How would you describe the current learning environment at Seneca?" and question 13, "If you were to share your experiences with teachers in other schools, district administrators, or the School Board about your experiences at Seneca, what would you tell them?" with six responses to each question. Respondents to question five referenced focus on programs and consistency, descriptions associated with principal leadership. Francisca stated that Seneca teachers used the same programs and strategies with consistency, core programs with integrity, not working in isolation. Pat and Mimi shared similar observations, as both mentioned the consistent use of core programs.

Stronger responses came from respondents on question 13, posed as a reflective question. George had significant positive remarks on principal leadership, including the former principal and the current principal:

I am lucky to have been here from day one with Dr. Vaughn. The previous principal was a humanitarian, and Vaughn was a professional. We made the recommendation for Karen [to be principal] after Dr. Vaughn left, an overwhelming recommendation. It was the best transition we could hope for. We had consistency and avoided changing programs from year to year... We could go in and train almost any school on what we do.

Lisa referenced the "great support from our principal." She also commented on Dr. Vaughn's leadership. Denise portrayed the responsiveness of the administration, "I ask for something and it gets done." Perhaps the most compelling remark came from Susan, the music teacher; "It takes a strong leader that really knows what they are doing. They care, support the teachers, have a vision of what it takes, beginning to end, to make a better student....Teachers need to be led."

Other questions elicited responses that referenced the administration and principal leadership. These included some compelling responses. Responding to question four, Pat stated,

I was hired by Dr. Vaughn... Some [teachers] were flat mean. Nasty as nasty could be. At some point I requested a transfer, but Vaughn said, "You have to figure it out." We go out of our way to be nice to people. Vaughn would state, "Don't write off one kid."

Another comment came from Claire, "Vaughn had such high expectations, not 'this is what I would like you to do,' but 'this is what you are going to do.'"

Responses to question six, referencing a "typical day" at Seneca included four references to principal leadership. Two teachers mentioned administrative support. Luanne related how the principal talked with students at lunch, an activity that Karen did every day. Karen shared this was an opportunity to connect with kids and find out what is going on for them academically and personally. By communicating directly with students and staff, Karen demonstrated a distributed leadership style.

Table 10

Frequency Table for Interview Responses by Theme

Theme	Sub Theme	Code	Total Responses	1 How did you come about the decision of becoming an educator?	2 What involvement did you have with the community growing up? College?	3 As you began your teaching career, what values did you hold that framed your teaching?	4 How did these values impact your arrival at Seneca to teach with this population of students?	5 How would you describe the current learning environment at Seneca?	6 What does a "typical" day look like at Seneca?	7 What factors influence the level of student achievement?	8 How would you describe the professional relationships among teachers?	9 What does a professional learning community mean to you?	10 Which teacher(s) do you work most closely with? Why?	11 What does it mean to you for Seneca to continue as an Excelling label, in light of the challenges the school has faced?	12 How have you changed or modified your educational practices at Seneca as a result of your experience at the school?	13 If you were to share your experiences with teachers in other schools, district administrators, or the School Board about your experiences at Seneca, what would you tell them?	14 Do you plan to stay at Seneca, why or why not?	15 Does being at an excellent Title I school influence your professional identity? Why or why not?	16 Do you have any other thoughts you would like to share, especially in the context of being an Excelling School?
Working Conditions	principal leadership	1	41				3	6	4	5	2	1	1	4	3	5	3	2	3
	environment	2	90			6	1	11	10	11	11	2	1	8	6	8	10		5
	teacher input	3	25					1		1	6	7	1	1	1	1	1	1	3
	teacher control over curriculum and instruction	4	16					2		1	3	1		3	2	1	0		3
Teacher Satisfaction	social factors	5	87	6	5	10	6	1	6	1	12	3	12	1	2	5	10	9	5
	practical factors	6	31	1	1	3	1	1	3	1	8	8	7	5	1	1	4		4
Teacher Professional Identity	teacher professional identity	7	88	12	12	12	6	1	1	2	3	2	1	4	4	8	7	11	3
	student characteristics	8	72	10	10	10	8	6	7	12	3	6		6	1	5	2	5	1
Professional Challenges	socio-cultural awareness of teachers	9	38	3	3	3	4	3	3	11	3	3	1	4	2	1	1	1	2
	distributed leadership	10	32	2	2	2	2	3		4	4	4	7	2	2	6	1	6	1
Perceptions of Teacher Leadership	learner centered leadership	11	34	3	3	5	1	2	3	2	3	2	1	1	7	3	4	4	2

Principal leadership surfaced in questions 12 and 14. Pat told a story of how the principal influenced her decision-making on professional development:

I learned that if the principal had an expectation, then I really needed to follow it; for example, taking Spalding training. I wasn't ordered to, but the principal [Dr. Vaughn] said, "You are the only teacher that did not sign up for the training." (*Pause*) I took the training. She [the current principal] doesn't worry about us loafing...If you walk into a classroom, everyone is doing what they should be doing.

Two teachers, Claire and George credited Vaughn for turning them [teachers] "into professionals." Claire credited Karen for continuing this focus, but that she was "a little more relaxed." When asked if she planned to stay at Seneca, Luanne responded, "As long as Karen is here."

**Environment.** Environment surfaced as the sub theme with the highest frequency of references in the interviews with teachers (90 responses). Interview questions 5, 6, 7, 8 and 14 had 10 or more references to environmental factors. According to the literature review, environmental factors include professional relationships of teachers and the school culture (Street, 2004). The majority of the studies cited relationships between experienced teachers and new teachers as environmental factors (Clayton & Schoonmaker, 2007; Freedman & Appleman, 2008, 2009; Liu 2007; Liu & Meyer, 2005; Olsen & Anderson, 2007). Based upon the review of the responses and key words from the interviews, I have delineated environmental factors as associated with the school climate. Professional relationships with teachers most clearly emerged within the theme of teacher satisfaction under the sub theme of social factors. Environmental factors appear to be related to a variety of other factors as shared by the respondents. As



an example, when asked to describe the learning environment at Seneca in interview question five, social factors resulted in 10 coded references, along with six references to professional identity and eight responses related to student characteristics. The absence of a single reference to either teacher input or teacher control over curriculum and instruction was consistent with the relatively low frequency of these items throughout the interviews. Examples of environmental components included references to "structured," "consistent," "programs" and "fidelity." These terms indicated a collective focus exists at the school. As a theme, however, focus did not emerge in the literature review. I will address focus later in the findings as a distinct theme that emerged through observation and data analysis.

George shared, "We are doing similar things at different levels, AR, SuccessMaker, Thinking Maps.<sup>17</sup> All are talking the same terminology and expectations....It reduces the stress level talking apples to apples." Jody described a learning environment with a "high continuity of instruction." Lisa stated, "We really are serious about learning. We are here to make sure kids learn." Bob believed that the learning environment was very focused and linear; "We follow factory rules, and we commit to them." "We are thriving, not just treading water!" Francisca stated emphatically. Carolyn provided a more reserved description of an environment that was strict yet caring. Denise described an environment that

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<sup>17</sup> Accelerated Reader, Thinking Maps and SuccessMaker are instructional programs used at Seneca. The other three programs are Math Connects, Spalding Reading and Response to Intervention.

was more pressured than her previous school with "more of a push to get the kids to meet the benchmarks." As a special education teacher, this was a new approach that she was navigating at Seneca. Sharon described the environment as "dynamic, focused," similar to Susan's view of Seneca's learning environment; "Kids have a feeling that everyone is on the same page." Luanne described the learning environment as "a well-oiled machine."

Both Karen and Craig talked about the learning environment as well from the principal's perspective. Karen stated that the learning environment was pretty straight forward; "You have to respect teachers' time and that respect can 'make or break you.'" She described instances where she deliberately withheld information or requests from the district office to make sure the teachers could focus on instruction in the classroom. One example included contact with me as the Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources to ask clarifying questions regarding what counted or did not count as time for PLCs for teachers and their contracted work day. My response was to focus on opportunities to say "yes." Karen responded that she had hoped that I would say that because she wanted to make the PLCs as straight forward and easy as possible for the teachers. Karen described the school environment at Seneca as "an easy place to be principal." I will address this perception from Karen in Chapter 5.

Craig described a school environment that had changed during his tenure as principal. When he first became principal at Seneca, he described an environment with a small core of teachers who "ran the place." Craig stated,

"They were not real happy with me when I arrived....We needed to change the attitude." Craig recounted how the environment changed to one that was "orderly," and the relationships with teachers, students and parents became "respectful." Craig attributed much of the success in changing the school culture due to an established focus, having a common school goal; "Teachers can tell you what they are working on. They are all on the same page and sharing data." Craig described an environment that focused on instruction, something different from many of the other Title I schools in the District. According to Craig, every decision made regarding individual students started with instruction and student achievement and ended with student achievement.

Other perspectives suggested a common view of the learning environment at Seneca. Theresa, the principal's secretary, and Matt and Grace, parents, described an environment consistent with the descriptions of the teachers and administrators. Theresa shared that she saw Seneca as having a "firm structure," and that the grade levels mix together so teachers know where students are going [achievement levels], and what the expectations for students are. She concluded, "It is a positive environment for students....It is a safe place to learn." Matt and Grace felt that both the current and former principals created an environment that said to teachers, "reach out for parent support." Matt stated that he had always felt welcomed in the Seneca environment, and that he observed very positive morale with teachers. Joyce shared the importance of high expectations and that the school appeared to be "unwavering" and consistent.

Similar descriptions of the school environment emerged in other interview questions with teachers. Interview question six asked teachers to describe a "typical day" at Seneca. Ten of the responses connected to environment. Luanne described her typical day with "no lost instructional minutes." Susan, the music teacher, described her day as, "No time lost. We don't have passing periods. One [class] goes out; one [class] comes in." The art teacher, Carolyn, similarly described the day as one where, "we live by the clock." George described the day with no hidden surprises, that teachers are prepared; "The only variable to our day is where the students are. If they [students] are prepared, the day just flows."

Environment also surfaced as a theme related to interview question seven which asked what factors influence student achievement. All but one of the interview participants mentioned environment as a factor, consistent with the responses in questions 5 and 6. Susan stated, "Everyone has the will to keep going, day after day. There is a constant push." Sharon mentioned the importance of the consistency of programs from grade level to grade level; "Every kid gets the same understanding." Carolyn described "teacher tenacity" as influencing student achievement. She elaborated, "We get them to school, make sure there is something in their belly, we get after their homework and make sure they learn." The environment of teachers caring and being focused on student achievement had been echoed by both Bob and Francisca. The responses to question 7 aligned with other responses delineated in questions 5 and 6.

Questions 8 and 14 had high responses to environment, with 11 and 10 references respectively. Each of these questions also had a high response rate for social factors; question eight elicited 12 references and question 14 contained 10 references. Because the descriptions of environmental factors included relationships with teachers and other staff members, I will address questions 8 and 14 under the theme of social factors.

**Teacher input.** The literature review supported teacher input (3) as an important factor in quality of professional life (Freedman & Appleman, 2008, 2009; Ingersoll, 2001, 2002; Kearney, 2008; Moscovici, 2009; Olsen & Anderson, 2007). The data suggest, however, that teacher input may be less of a factor for teachers at Seneca except as teacher input applies to the current implementation of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), and how teachers participate in Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1998, 2006). The majority of the responses for all interview questions contained minimal references to teacher input, and by frequency (25 references) teacher input emerged as one of the least frequent responses, second only to teacher control over curriculum and instruction (16 references) as the lowest frequency response. Interview question eight asked teachers to describe the professional relationships among teachers. Because question eight also had high response rates to environment and to social factors, teacher input in this context appears to be related to the school environment and teacher relationships. The comments of the six responses coded to teacher input support this finding. Pat summarized the context of teacher input as follows:

We are constantly talking professionally. We get feedback from third grade on what we are doing and can do better, and we provide the same type of feedback for first grade. We communicate all day long [with other teachers], at the copy machine or where ever. We are proud of each other as teachers. Our Career Ladder shows the impact.

Claire shared the importance of teacher input as part of the school's vertical articulation between grade levels. She connected articulation with positive working relationships with other teachers. George stated "going to the right person" was part of teacher input. Bob described teacher input with his work with a committee called Seneca Pride, with a purpose of getting more staff involvement. He believed this committee provided additional opportunity for him to share opinions and ideas in the school. Francisca described Seneca as a school where teachers "share strategies openly." To her, this was very different from two other Title I schools in the District where she worked previously; "praise and criticism can create conflict if not managed appropriately."

Interview question nine asked teachers "What does a professional learning community mean to you?" This question elicited the largest number of negative responses (six), with three responses specifically negative as coded to teacher input. "I haven't gotten anything from PLC's. They are redundant. The paperwork bogs us down. Claire [my teaching partner] and I get more done over the phone," stated Pat. She contended that the purpose of PLC's seemed appropriate, but they were too structured to benefit the teachers. Her teaching partner, Claire, had a similar view, "We do it anyway [PLC's]. The structure of the PLC's is busy work, going to another grade level and working with them

through articulation is really important. As far as structured PLC's, are we doing it for our kids or doing it for the [professional development] hours?"

Both Claire and Pat talked about the importance of working together as a community of practice, but wanted more autonomy in how this was determined. Bob felt in many ways the PLC's had taken away input from teachers, describing PLC's as "very vanilla in some ways, not really cutting edge." He suggested that PLC's should be more teacher-driven, letting teachers put the PLC's together for practical collaboration.

Conversely, some teachers spoke positively on teacher input and PLC's. Sharon commented on the 3rd grade PLC as being one that had a lot of dialogue which meant positive teacher input. I observed a meeting with the 3rd grade PLC and witnessed an exchange between teachers that suggested a great deal of teacher input existed regarding decision-making with curriculum and instruction.

Although I observed only one meeting, it appeared to be a genuine professional exchange of ideas. With a researcher present, the participants could have altered their behavior as a result of my presence. I do not believe, however, that this was the case, as the teachers often talked over one another and did not appear to be rehearsed in any of their behaviors and statements. The observation of the 3rd grade PLC is addressed in more detail later in the summary and findings under the theme of focus.

Susan, the music teacher, had a different perspective on teacher input and PLC's. She described her district-wide PLC as a group of elementary music

teachers who met once a month at the same school to share ideas, skills and look at grade levels and achievement goals. She described her six member PLC as, "All are functioning members." Luanne stated that the school was doing well regarding teacher input and PLC's. "There is sharing, aligning scope and sequences," she added.

The majority of the teachers interviewed supported the concepts of PLC's, in line with Wenger's description of communities of practice (1998, 2006). They disliked the requirement to track time spent in PLC's, completing paperwork and following guidelines on how PLC's should operate. Teachers described a more positive approach to unstructured work with teachers that appeared more authentic to them compared to the structured PLC. I believe communities of practice have existed at Pima long before the District implementation of PLC's. "We do it anyway," describes the teacher commitment to collaboration with colleagues, whether prescribed or not by the District.

Other comments regarding teacher input included the connection of responsibility as a teacher and the need to voice opinions and ideas. One of the most compelling comments came from Bob, who at the conclusion of the interview became passionate about his profession as a teacher. He shared his thoughts regarding the general climate in Arizona and how it was different from where he taught in another western state before coming to Arizona; "As a profession, in 2010, many teachers feel defeated. We need to bring voice to teachers in Arizona. We are at the bottom." Bob talked candidly about what he



saw as very aggressive and anti-teacher/anti-union approach to education from the Arizona Legislature. He cited as an example the legislation that removed seniority as a factor for Reduction in Force.<sup>18</sup> Bob was the only teacher that talked about teacher input from a professional and political point of view beyond the school setting. The fact that none of the other teachers addressed this point on teacher input was intriguing.

As a school district, Seneca has an active teacher association (union) which engages in traditional teacher union activities including negotiating the employment contract and representing teachers regarding discipline and evaluation issues. Within the majority of urban and suburban school districts throughout the United States, a culture of teacher input through the local teacher's association is a common vehicle for teacher voices to be heard. The lack of mention of teacher input as associated with the local teachers' association throughout the study belied my assumption that this connection would exist. One of my primary responsibilities as Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources is to work directly with the teachers' association and negotiate the employment contract. I believe this assumption of a connection to teacher input and the

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<sup>18</sup> HB 2011 signed by Governor Jan Brewer in September of 2009 eliminated seniority as a factor in Reduction in Force. The Arizona Education Association (AEA), the largest teachers union in the state, viewed the legislation as retaliation for lobbying activities at the legislature, available at <http://www.arizonaaea.org/blog/>. AEA filed suit but was unsuccessful in its attempt to block the legislation. Subsequently, in 2010, the legislature passed additional legislation that made the changes effective and unlikely to be challenged legally.

teachers' association did not play out with the majority of teachers I interviewed and observed. This point will be addressed in Chapter 5.

**Teacher control over curriculum and instruction.** The lowest frequency responses in the interviews were attributed to the theme of teacher control over curriculum and instruction, with 16 responses. Seven of the 16 interview questions did not elicit a single response coded to this theme. Of the questions that did have a coded response, questions 8, 11 and 16 each had three responses coded. The other questions had 1 or 2 coded responses for this theme. The low response rate for teacher control over curriculum and instruction in relation to the high response rates of teacher professional identity, environment, social factors, student characteristics and principal leadership suggest that the presence of satisfiers, items identified as job loading or job enhancement, mean less likelihood of the presence of dissatisfiers, here identified as company policies and administration. Although teachers had some criticism of PLC's, their overall responses to interview questions indicated that other positive factors were greater satisfiers and did not leave enough of a negative impact on the quality of professional life for teachers to describe them as dissatisfiers. This finding is consistent with Herzberg; "The opposite of job satisfaction is not job dissatisfaction, but *no* job satisfaction; and similarly, the opposite of job dissatisfaction is not job satisfaction but *no* job dissatisfaction," (2003, p. 22).

Pat described teacher control over curriculum and instruction in the context of working with other grade level teachers; "We get feedback from 3rd

grade on what we are doing and can do better, and we provide the same type of feedback for 1st grade." As a school, Seneca built in the opportunity for articulation, teachers working between grade levels as part of their instructional planning and organization. According to Claire, "Vertical articulation is very important at the beginning of the year. We have our vertical articulation day." I was not able to observe the articulation day as referenced. Karen provided background information on the articulation day, stating that this day was used by teachers to work between grade levels, for teachers to dialogue around efficacy, and to get feedback from other teachers in order to better prepare students for the next grade level. According to Wenger (1998, 2006), articulation would be an activity that exists within a community of practice.

Other answers indicated sporadic views of teacher control dependent upon the context of the interview question. In response to question 12, asking if teachers had modified their practice since teaching at Seneca, Lisa described that she had much more use of technology, more differentiation, constantly modifying and integrating content to tie everything together. Bob stated that he had left out some of his teaching practices. He described his approach as "constructivist," and as a result of being at Seneca he made some practical decisions to narrow some of the scope of his teaching. Francisca elaborated similarly in her response to question 13, "You can teach how you want as long as you focus on the core program." Sharon described her role as the reading specialist as one that had her "very involved" in creating and designing programs and training.

## **Teacher Satisfaction**

The findings of teacher satisfaction fall into the sub themes of social factors (5) and practical factors (6). Social factors were coded for 87 of the interview responses, one of the highest frequencies of the sub themes in the interviews, behind environment and teacher professional identity. Practical factors had 31 coded responses, the 3rd lowest frequency of the 11 coded response sub themes. Questions 5, 8, 10 and 14 had 10 or more responses coded to social factors. Question nine had the highest coding for practical factors with eight coded responses.

**Social factors.** Survey responses indicated that social factors were listed by six respondents for question B, identified as supports for quality of professional life as addressed previously. When teachers were asked to describe the learning environment at Seneca (interview question five), 10 of the responses were coded to social factors. Social factors included relationships with students, teachers, parents and the principal. Key words from responses indicated that teachers valued relationships as determined by word choice and inclusive vocabulary. As an example, when teachers used "we, us, our" I coded these words as social factors. In context, questions 5, 8 and 14 had high frequency rates for social factors, similar to the frequency rates with the sub theme environment as mentioned earlier for these questions. All 16 interview questions had at least one response coded to social factors, indicative of the prevalence of the sub theme.

Question five asked teachers to describe the learning environment. The social factors that emerged during this question related to the school environment responses. George mentioned teachers willing to work with one another beyond grade levels. Jody stated the people are willing to work with one another. Francisca described that at Seneca, "We are a team. We share goals and expectations." Carolyn responded, "We are not accepting of 'I can't'. We help students believe in themselves." Denise observed that there was less parental involvement at Seneca compared to her previous school. Sharon concluded, "We work well together, it creates a nice flowing dynamic. It works." Susan described the respect she felt from her fellow teachers; "Everyone accepts that this [music] is a legitimate part of the learning at Seneca." Luann stated, "We talk to each other, we want to learn from each other and we are here for the kids." Teachers described the learning environment as one that was focused, with all teachers supporting this focus. This theme will be addressed later in the findings.

Consistent statements followed interview question eight, asking teachers to describe the professional relationships among teachers. All 12 participants responded to this sub theme. Luann described the relationships as better in comparison to other schools where she had worked and that at Seneca, "There is no backstabbing." Susan held a similar view; "Everyone here is focused on students...There are no petty things between teachers." According to Sharon, Seneca was a place where, "We all talk to each other. We all get along very well." Denise described Seneca as very professional, consistent with her previous

experiences within the District. Claire described very positive relationships, especially in the context of the vertical articulation at the beginning of the year. George felt that it had taken several years to build the effective relationships that he described as a "Mix of friends outside of campus. There is respect with colleagues." Jody painted a picture that included a positive rapport with the administration, and that she felt, "There isn't anyone that I would hesitate going to with a question." Susan stated she could "call on anyone." Luann also stated, ""People are friendly, open to suggestions, and even say 'hi' to the substitutes." None of the comments referred to any negative relationships between teachers or with the principal. These comments regarding the current professional relationships contrast with some of the descriptions of the work environment as it existed many years ago, gleaned from interview question four, describing teachers' arrival at Seneca.

Pat described an environment that initially had been very negative when she first arrived at Seneca, "Some [teachers] were flat mean. Nasty as nasty could be." She felt the relationships were so bad that she had requested a transfer. Ultimately, Pat did stay at Seneca, due in large part to Dr. Vaughn encouraging her to "stick it out." Claire had a similar experience upon her arrival; "My welcome to the school was, 'I hope you are better than the last one [EIS teacher] here.'" Bob described his arrival as one that allowed him to feel welcome and that "I can leave here on my lunch break." Bob came to Seneca six years ago, compared to Pat and Claire who started at Seneca more than 10 years ago.

Francisca described that it has taken time for her to build relationships in the two years she has been at the school, due in large part to her role as the instructional coach; "I had to work hard to establish relationships due to my role. I struggle to find ways to build relationships with students because I am not in the classroom. I have had to be patient, build rapport with teachers."

All 12 teachers provided information that they worked with other teachers, regardless of teaching assignment according to interview question 10. Some teachers did more than list the teachers they worked most closely with. Pat described working with all grade levels, specifically mentioning 6th grade "reading buddies," an activity that has 6th grade students reading with 2nd grade students. The activities for reading buddies are coordinated by the teachers at the different grade levels. Pat further explained, "There is not one teacher on campus that I would hesitate to call if I needed something." Claire stated, "If we need anything, we can ask any teacher at any grade level." George shared a strong sense of trust with the school administration; "The administration is always there." Jody felt strongly about the professional relationship with colleagues, describing one of the special education teachers, Denise, as "wonderful." Lisa described working with her grade level team, the librarian, Title I reading specialist and the gifted teacher in order to "bounce ideas off one-another." Bob described working with teachers through his PLC as a way that "forces us to check in with one-another." For him, this was a delicate challenge as he inherited a teaching assignment previously held by a teacher who had died. "I wanted to

set my own path,” he concluded as part of the work with other teachers, following the teacher’s death.

Francisca held a similar view, taking care to build relationships with teachers. She observed that she worked with some of the newer teachers on campus when she first arrived, but now she had built relationships and that “veterans are beginning to open up.” Denise described her work with the 3rd grade as very positive, and that “George is the go to guy. You tell him something once and it is done.” She found that at Seneca, she does more work with regular classroom teachers than she did previously. As a special education teacher, she felt more integrated as a result of being a member of the 3rd grade PLC. Susan described her work with other teachers involving her connection with 2nd and 3rd grade, and that she did more academically in music now than she ever had before.

The strongest evidence of the impact of social factors as described by teachers emerged from their responses to interview question 14, asking if the teachers planned to stay at Seneca. With the exception of Lisa who would be retiring at the end of the school year, all respondents indicated that they would like to stay at Seneca. Teachers indicated a variety of reasons why they would stay, but all 11 affirmative responses were coded to social factors. Luanne wanted to stay due to “positive communication between teachers,” and the fact that “Parents respect us, don’t tell us how to do our jobs.” She also stipulated, “I like the people I work with.” Susan was more enthusiastic; “I love it here...I have the best room, a great PTO (Parent-Teacher Organization)...It is a dream job.”



Sharon confirmed that she wanted to stay, but didn't know how long as she was within a few years of retirement. Francisca and Carolyn felt strongly about Seneca, with Francisca stating Seneca was "my family," and Carolyn calling Seneca "my home. I live here." Bob shared that his desire to stay at Seneca was due to his belief that "We can improve the way of life for people around here." This belief was directly related to his work with the Seneca Pride committee.

Jody attributed her desire to stay at Seneca to "a great working environment." She elaborated, "I can't imagine a better staff to work with." George felt the same way; "People want to be here. This is where I want to be." Claire alluded to the pride the staff felt regarding their academic success as an important factor for her to stay. Pat summed up her desire to continue at Seneca; "I have been at other schools and I know this one rules!" The strength of the responses and the mention of work environment, relationship with colleagues and community, and use of terms like "family" and "home" indicated the desire to stay at Seneca as having a clear social factor.

The strength of responses described the school and relationships with colleagues in a positive light. These relationships surfaced as satisfiers, indicating that teachers planned to stay at the school. The absence of any respondents who indicated a desire to leave the school demonstrates the existence of the school environment and its social factors as indicative of satisfiers. This finding is consistent with motivation-hygiene theory.

**Practical factors.** As a sub theme, practical factors (6) had lower levels of responses than the majority of the sub themes, with 31 responses. Interview questions 9 and 11 had the highest frequency of responses for practical factors. Question nine asked teachers to describe the professional relationships among teachers. Six of the responses indicated a negative view of practical factors associated with PLCs. Relating this to the literature review, practical factors included policies and procedures and the union contract (Stotko et al., 2007). The PLC requirements were negotiated with the local teachers' association as part of compensation for the contract year. For Pat, "The paperwork bogs us down." Similarly, Claire felt that "The structure of the PLCs is busy work." George agreed; "Now the PLCs have added paperwork for us." According to Jody, part of the challenge with PLCs concerned how teachers were put together on PLCs without any direction or training on working with one another. Bob felt that district administrators should have asked teachers "how we should put this [PLCs] together." Denise also commented about the practical setup of her PLC; "I wonder if it might be helpful to work with other LRC [learning resource center] teachers in a PLC." These responses were consistent with the responses for teacher input, indicating a desire for teachers to have more input for the work associated with PLCs. In response to question number 13, George concluded, "I like unions to a point, but I am not crazy about the unions and the PLC hours." I did not observe teachers navigating some of the professional disagreements or

having deep conversations that are part of communities of practice. I will address this in Chapter 5 with recommendations.

Teachers also responded to practical factors when asked what it meant for Seneca to continue as an Excelling school in interview question 11. Seven responses were coded to practical factors. Similar to question nine, the majority of responses coded to practical factors were negative, with class size as the most cited factor. Bob worried that Seneca drew students from other schools based solely on the school label, and that a lot of other factors went into an excelling school. Francisca commented, “Teachers are getting tired, large class sizes, things they cannot control get them down.” Sharon also worried about large class sizes and the impact they could have on teacher work load. Susan stated, “Class size impacts the stress level of teachers. I work with large groups [as a music teacher] so class size doesn’t bother me.” Pat also mentioned class size, and that “differentiation is scary” with large class sizes. Claire focused on the difficulty of reaching all students with large classes. Teachers had little control over determination of class sizes.

Some responses related to time as a practical factor. Susan felt that PLCs took time away from students when PLC work required teachers “to do work not directly related to kids.” Denise felt that the need for more time to work one on one with students was an important practical factor for student success. Francisca shared that she believed she was responsible for trying to protect teacher time, along with the principal and others.

Some positive practical factors emerged. As an example, during the interview with Claire, she left briefly to go do her supervision duty after school. She reported without any complaint, but described having to do supervision as a part of the practical duties of teachers. Lisa shared the need to make sure technology worked effectively and being able to integrate the technology in her lesson plans had an impact on her. She shared that she learned to have a back-up plan in case technology did not work properly. Denise also cited working with technology, stating that technology was her “professional goal.” Other comments describing practical factors included Luanne’s description of Seneca as “a well-oiled machine,” where daily operational items at the school ran very well. For the teachers, this meant that the school functioned smoothly from an operational sense and that the staff all did their parts to make sure students learned. Jody described her need to do supervisory duty and the impact of the change of the district’s bell schedules for elementary as impacting her. Susan described that part of the impact for her was the daily schedule, and that students didn’t have passing periods when they come to see her for music classes.

### **Teacher Professional Identity**

Teachers consistently connected professional identity (7) to the quality of professional life at Seneca Elementary School. Questions linked to ascertaining teacher identity followed Seidman's use of life experience and reflection in establishing key components of teacher identity (2006). Interview questions 1, 2 and 3 had all 12 participants responding to teacher professional identity. Question

15 had 11 of the 12 responses coded to professional identity. The total frequency of responses (88) was the second highest response frequency of all interview themes, just below environment (90), and just above social factors (88).

Teachers identified professional identity as it related to 1) connection to education, teaching and schools, 2) extracurricular activities, 3) stated values, and 4) working at a Title 1 school.

**Professional identity and connection to education, teaching and schools.** All of the interview participants identified a connection to education, teaching and schools as an influence into the decision of becoming a teacher in interview question one, which asked how teachers came about the decision to become a teacher. Most of the participants had influence as children or as young adults. Susan related a life-changing experience when her 7th grade teacher recognized that she had a good singing voice and since that time, "I have always wanted to teach." Sharon described her childhood, "I loved my 3rd grade teacher," and that she never wanted to do anything else besides teach. Francisca knew as a young child she would be a teacher, having a tremendous experience with her kindergarten teacher, with whom she built a long-standing relationship, identifying her as a mentor. Bob related the connection he had with teachers during his high school experience, and that he could see how teachers impacted people, something he aspired to do. He saw teachers as respected, creative and influential. Joan knew she wanted to be a teacher in high school after she successfully taught her neighbor how to do a summersault. Before she graduated

high school she was teaching archery to other students. By the time she was in junior high school, Jody wanted to be a teacher, reflective of her experiences in education. For Claire, the discovery was in elementary school; "I loved my 3rd grade teacher." Claire also shared the influence of family as a factor in her decision to become a teacher.

Family influence emerged as a common characteristic of teacher identity. Claire connected the relationship with her mother-in-law who was a teacher, and that she thought Claire would be a good teacher. George described his childhood where he spent a lot of time at school where his mother was a school secretary. He believed his experience and his mother's influence were factors in his decision to become a teacher, noting that "You can't put dollars on the personal reward [of teaching]." Lisa's father wanted to be a teacher. Although he never did become one, he served as a school board member. This influenced her decision to become a teacher and impacted her siblings who all have some connection to education in their various professions. Denise described the influence of her mom as a significant factor in deciding to go into education. Luanne came from a family of teachers; her mom, aunt and cousins are teachers.

Two teachers described their professional identity through the lens of being a parent. Carolyn related her decision to become a teacher having occurred in mid-life, after raising her family. Through the interaction with the school, she moved from parent to paraprofessional, returned to college for her master's degree

in education and then began teaching as a substitute. George shared that his classroom is one that he would want his children to be proud of.

**Extracurricular activities and teacher identity.** All of the interview participants described activities with sports, clubs, religious organizations or community as part of their life experiences. The teachers had varied levels of activity or engagement. As a child, Pat behaved as a leader; "I organized ridiculous things...I was the oldest one [on the block] and they all listened." Many of the teachers talked about their involvement in sports and other school based extra curricular activities during their high school and college experiences. Others described membership in sororities, organizing dorm activities, volunteer work with organizations like the Red Cross and Community Food Bank, and participating in Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts. Three of the teachers described the involvement with churches and synagogues and related organizations, including youth groups and camps. For several teachers, these connections shaped their current lives. As an example, Bob organized many of the activities of Seneca Pride, aimed at improving the quality of life for the teachers. George coached lacrosse. Francisca was active in her church and Susan volunteered at the local Community Food Bank.

**Espoused values of teachers and professional identity.** Teachers described values that framed the beginning of their teaching career with terms such as "responsibility," "ideals", and "fairness" in their responses to question three, which asked participants to describe the values they held when they began

teaching. This is consistent with the literature review and teacher identity (Freedman & Appleman, 2008; Olsen, 2008). Pat stated that she felt teaching was a great responsibility, that she was "taking on the world." Claire also felt the sense of responsibility as she began her career teaching ELL students. Lisa related responsibility to "make sure every child would learn." Bob described the responsibility he felt, seeing himself as a role model. "We are here to meet student needs, for them to do their personal best," stated Carolyn.

Several participants related the ideals they had as teachers (Clayton & Schoonmaker, 2007). Luanne explained her decision to leave private business in the retail sector because, "it was a better value to give than to take." She too described her desire to be a role model. According to Susan, her ideals were predicated upon her belief that, "Every kid needs to feel there is something special they can do." Denise stated that she was very protective of her students, "as if they were my own children," and that her ideal was to get the students to achieve "beyond the IEP." According to Jody, "Children can learn when material is presented appropriately. All children have some creativity." Claire described how she started teaching with the idea that she could "come in and change everything....I wanted to do the best for my kids." George talked about the first couple of years teaching when he had to feel his way around. George reflected on the change in his values, "I realize how much I didn't know, and have been learning more and more....Everything is changing and we have to be willing to change." The participants used terms like "all children" and "every child,"



suggesting ideals that were universal. None of the respondents to question number three suggested that some students could not be reached or helped, and none of the teachers described their ideals with any type of excuse or exception. This related to the general school environment and its focus on student achievement, regardless of the characteristics that typically impeded student achievement like poverty (Berliner 2006), or a lack of fairness.

Teachers described fairness as a value that framed their professional identity, similar to the concept of social justice (Olsen 2008). Claire described this sense of fairness as a primary reason she began teaching ELL students. Later in her career she moved to the regular classroom, taking this ideal with her. Jody defined her belief in fairness by establishing clarity around her role as a teacher; "kids can be outside the box. That would be ok with me. I am not here to be kids' friend." Lisa shared her belief of fairness by stating that every child should learn, and her experience teaching from pre-school through college allowed this to be a core value. Bob described the urgency he felt working with students as the demonstration of fairness. Francisca shared her belief in differentiating for students as a way to meet their needs fairly and equitably. Carolyn connected her sense of fairness to her various life experiences. She shared that at different points in her life she had experienced affluence and poverty, and that students needed to understand the challenges they faced in the world. The strongest sense of fairness came from Sharon. She painted a portrait of her childhood, growing up in a poor neighborhood in Baltimore and beginning her teaching career in New

York City; "I knew how bad those ghettos were....Baltimore was a working town. New York was a welfare town." Her career took her from the inner city, to Mexico for over a decade, and ultimately to Seneca elementary. She made a choice to work at a Title school instead of the more affluent schools in the District. "I relate to the scruffy poor kids."

**Professional identity and teaching at an excelling Title I school.**

Interview question 15 asked teachers if being at an excelling Title I school influenced their professional identity and why or why not. Only one teacher, Bob, answered no. He explained that his professional identity was independent of the school label, "My identity goes beyond. I don't depend on that." He related that being recognized as a good teacher prior to his arrival at Seneca had shaped his professional identity. Bob did, however, exhibit a strong connection to his colleagues and a sense of belonging within the school. Bob had a high level of energy and creativity that showed with his music ability, something he shared at the flag raising ceremony, and also wrote a song parody that is discussed later in the findings.

The rest of the participants related that being at Seneca as an excelling Title I school influenced their professional identity, aligned with Gee's affinity group (2000-2001). Pat stated, "You know that you had your hands in it [the excelling label] somehow." Claire connected her experience as Seneca and how she approached working with her students; "I am sorry they may have a hard life at home, but you can come to school and have a good life here...We are

compassionate, but we don't do a lot of babying." George described the impact on his identity and Seneca being an excellent school; "When I am in conversation, 'it's a good school,' not, 'it's a Title school'....It's just good teaching." According to Lisa, being at an excellent Title I school connected strongly to her professional identity; "I revel in the fact that we are an excellent Title I school....It is more satisfying being excellent here than at my previous school that was excellent with a high SES." The impact on her professional identity and working at Seneca caused Francisca to be willing to wear her school shirt in public, something she had never done before in her teaching career. Having taught at two other Title I schools in the Seneca district, she stated, "There is hope for other [Title I] schools." Francisca also expressed a sense of humor and frustration; "We joke about No Child Left Behind, and instead say 'No Teacher Left Standing.'" Denise commented that it "was always good to be at a winning school....to be on a winning team." Carolyn shared her sense of pride being at Seneca, "You tell people you work at Seneca, that Title I school that is doing so well. I like the association with the school." Sharon beamed with her response, "I know about disadvantage. I love bragging. People from other states pick my brain on what we are doing." "I am always surprised that we are excellent," stated Susan, "I don't know how we do it." According to Luanne, "There is satisfaction here compared to what I could have done at my previous school. We make it happen."

Jody framed the impact on professional identity within the larger context of the teaching profession.

It does make me feel like I am playing on a winning team. And there are so many ways to feel like a failure on a regular basis as a teacher. At least that is my experience. It's nice to have something to point to, like 'maybe this is not working in my classroom,' but overall across the board we are doing something that's successful.

Her mention of teachers often feeling like they have failed permeates throughout many aspects of the teaching profession. The movie *Waiting for Superman* had been released prior to the study, and its premise of failure in poor inner city schools resonated with the context of the casting of failure for teachers (2010). No other teacher interviewed mentioned failure, yet Jody's statement rang true within the context of school failure, when a school does not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as delineated in NCLB. Jody's comment also related to Bob's belief that the current political environment in Arizona viewed teachers and educators as failures. From both Jody and Bob I sensed a combination of defiance and pride in being teachers. For Jody, the connection to professional identity represented the culture at Seneca and how teachers viewed their success within the broader world of school accountability. To her, the professional identity related to being at an excelling Title I school was profound.

### **Professional Challenges**

I categorized student characteristics (8) and socio-cultural awareness of teachers (9) as the sub themes for professional challenges in the literature review. According to the student demographics, with over 50% identified poverty rate and the number of students identified as ELL, Seneca fit the category of a school that would impact teacher retention based upon student characteristics (Ingersoll,

2001, 2002; Strunk & Robinson, 2006). Interview questions 3 and 7 had the highest level of responses coded to student characteristics. In addition, student characteristics had the 4th highest total frequency (72) out of the 11 sub themes. This frequency suggests the impact student characteristics have as a contributing factor in the quality of professional life for teachers. The literature review, however, relates student characteristics to higher rates of turnover, and that teachers who have a more positive perception of student behavior have higher rates of retention (Liu & Meyer, 2005). The stability rate for teachers at Seneca and teacher interview responses suggest that student characteristics impact quality of professional life at Seneca but do not contribute to teacher attrition.

Socio-cultural awareness of teachers had a response frequency of 38, 6th out of 11 sub themes by frequency. Only question nine, asking teachers to describe the factors that influenced the level of student achievement, resulted in a frequency higher than 10, with 11 responses. The highest frequency of socio-cultural awareness of teachers in the other questions was four, coded to questions 4 and 11. This response rate suggests the link between socio-cultural awareness and student characteristics is most strongly associated to quality of professional life for teachers as they describe factors that impact student achievement.

**Student characteristics.** Question three asked teachers about their values when they began teaching. Ten of the participants related a connection to students and student characteristics in their responses. Luanne shared her perception of student characteristics as being universal, regardless of the

background of students, "I had the expectation that kids go to college. I thought everyone pushed their kids to go to college." Susan felt that the change in the school had been positive, an increase in parent involvement even though the school had an increasing level of poverty. With Sharon, student characteristics, a sense of fairness and a focus on "civil rights" made her work at Seneca rewarding. She related the level of poverty at Seneca as a motivator for her to be effective. Denise described her belief in high expectations as she worked with special education students, and the importance of getting them to "achieve beyond the IEP." Jody felt student characteristics required her to make sure she delivered instruction to meet their needs; "Children can learn when material is presented appropriately, all children have some creativity." George acknowledged the changing demographics of the school without lament, "Everything is changing and we [teachers] have to be willing to change."

Carolyn described viewing student characteristics through the lens of a parent. "I am a bit of a disciplinarian....I am not afraid to raise my voice or give them that parental look. We are here to meet student needs, for them to do their personal best." Francisca believed in the importance of relationships with students and parents, stating, "I value relationships, with students, colleagues and parents." Denise described some disappointment in having less parental involvement at Seneca compared to her previous school.

All 12 responses to question seven, asking teachers to identify the characteristics that influence student achievement demonstrated a connection to

student characteristics. For the participants, establishing clear and consistent expectations for students was important. This indicated that teachers agreed upon a professional norm as they worked with students. Pat stated that students needed to know what to expect, describing her practice of writing the detailed learning schedule on the board. Claire described the importance of consistency, relating how her students were so accustomed to the classroom routine that when she was considering delaying a quiz that day the students asked her why she wasn't going to give the quiz. "I gave the quiz," she smirked. According to George, "It is a triad, students, teachers and parents all working together." Lisa was emphatic about the importance of expectations for students, stating that with these expectations students needed to feel empowered, and ultimately, "persistence pays off.... Kids are accountable, no whining, no excuses." She framed this response with teachers being responsible for setting the stage, "If teachers have expectations then so will parents." Bob described the importance of the teacher's attitude in setting expectations, and that these expectations needed to be communicated with parents.

Several participants demonstrated an understanding of the student characteristics at Seneca by relating how the school responded to students, but not as a deficit model response (Lipman, 1997). "We catch a lot of kids....They don't fall through the cracks," Francisca stated. Carolyn described how she saw the school addressing student needs as a result of "teacher tenacity," and that, "We get them to school, make sure there is something in their belly, we get after their

homework and make sure they learn." "Every kid gets the same understanding," Sharon stated, relating the interventions she coordinated for students.

**Socio-cultural awareness of teachers.** Question seven also had a high frequency rate coded to socio-cultural awareness of teachers. All 11 responses indicated a positive perception of an understanding of the students at Seneca. Although only one teacher identified her training as having a content relationship to socio-cultural awareness (Claire as part of her ELL background), a consistent understanding and awareness of teachers emerged from their responses. Claire mentioned the importance of understanding a student's home life, and that she realized her teaching needed to be consistent as a result. Jody concluded that, "parental involvement is foundational, even if they [students] don't speak English at home." Francisca described her awareness in terms of relationships; "They care about us and we care about them." Carolyn mentioned the importance of addressing poverty and that, "we make sure there is something in their belly." Three teachers were fluent in Spanish; Sharon, Francisca and Claire. None of them made the reference to their language as a socio-cultural tool. The single reference to Spanish as bridging communication with some parents came from the principal's secretary, Theresa, who spoke Spanish. The fact that no teachers raised language in the interviews was intriguing, especially in light of the number of ELL students and the native languages spoken by the students. A connection to Lee's "Cultural Modeling" did not emerge as part of the descriptions teachers had regarding socio-cultural awareness of teachers (2007).



Some teachers connected larger class sizes with difficulties in meeting the needs of the students at Seneca, impeding their ability to be as effective with students, based upon their perception of student needs and the student demographics. Class size emerged as a practical factor which impacted quality of professional life in responses from question 11, which had four responses coded to socio-cultural awareness of teachers. According to Pat, class size impacted the ability for teachers to differentiate instruction, and as a result, "Teachers are very tired, more tired than ever." George alluded to the importance of having the awareness to provide the right programs for the students at Seneca, and because of this awareness, "We know our kids are learning." Judy addressed the changing school characteristics, and the fact that the number of students on free and reduced lunch continued to increase, "We don't change. We have to have high standards. We have more interventions to get kids to grade level." Bob was somewhat somber as he addressed the socio-cultural understanding of the staff, and worried, "What happens when the day comes and we are not [excelling]?" Bob talked about the fact that Seneca pulled students from other schools mostly because "parents assume Seneca is better....We stand out." The school has more than 250 students that attend through the District's open enrollment policy from outside the school boundaries. Luanne addressed the socio-cultural understanding by stating, "Students need more of a teacher's ability to fill in the gaps of their own experience."

The demonstration of the socio-cultural awareness of teachers and other staff members was evident in observation of the Seneca PLC whose membership will be detailed later in the findings, and the 3rd grade PLC. The Seneca PLC spent time reviewing student data, with each student receiving considerable time and discussion regarding their individual situation. I scripted an observation of one meeting I observed. In that observation, the discussion involved the various components of what impacted student achievement, including demographic information, native language, learning challenges, behavior, home situation and SES. There was evidence that the Seneca PLC members had a socio-cultural awareness of the students, but this awareness was related to the focus the staff demonstrated in their work and will be addressed later in the findings.

### **Perceptions of Teacher Leadership**

Leadership had a lower level of frequency, with 32 responses coded to distributed leadership (10) and 34 responses coded to learning centered leadership (11). The highest frequency rate for distributed leadership responses were in interview questions 11, 13, and 15. Learning centered leadership had its highest frequencies with question 12 and question 5. The responses indicate consistency with the literature review and teacher leadership (Collinson, 2004, Spillane et al., 2003). The relatively low frequency rate in comparison to other sub-themes suggests that perceptions of leadership may have a lower level of influence on quality of professional life in relation to other factors including environment, social factors and teacher professional identity.

**Distributed leadership.** Seven teachers responded to distributed leadership as a factor for quality of professional life for question 11, asking teachers to describe what it meant for Seneca to continue as an excelling school. Claire discussed the relationship she had with other teachers and the ability to utilize the expertise of one another. She described a particular instance where her teaching partner took her entire class, "I had to do an intervention with a student, and Pat took my class. She had 66 kids and they did fine." Pat and Claire described the fact that they made independent decisions like this on a continual basis, and that the principal trusted their judgment. George described how some of the programs were piloted by teachers early on when Craig asked for volunteers, "We [teachers] started with a pilot approach; as teachers saw success, they bought in. This happened before the school labels." Lisa mentioned the importance of teachers maintaining high standards, even if it meant retaining students in the grade level. She shared that teachers made these decisions, supported by the principal. Bob reflected that he was concerned that some teachers might feel they were held back, even though he himself felt empowered at the school. Francisca described her belief, "We need to be intuitive with our staff, be relevant." As an instructional coach, she saw her role supporting the principal, being protective of teachers and their instructional time.

Teachers also shared a distributed leadership as it related to sharing their experiences with others as asked in question 13. George felt that, "We could go in and train almost any school on what we do." Jody took ownership in the

success of the school; "Our results tell us that our programs are working." Judy related the importance of teachers and leadership with parents. "We are successful because parents buy-in, and parents buy-in because we are successful." She described the attitude of teachers at Seneca compared to other schools, "I came here because of the reputation. Teachers at other schools can sometimes be resentful." She likened the difference in teacher attitudes as a result of the collective approach to leadership. Francisca concluded that "You can teach how you want as long as you focus on the core program." According to Luanne, "We all take responsibility for where the school is [academically]." Question 15 had similar responses. Jody discussed the importance of teachers doing something successful as a team. Denise talked about how it felt good to be on a "winning team." Sharon talked about how other teachers sought her expertise and opinions on what they were doing at Seneca.

I observed distributed leadership at the 3rd grade PLC. All of the teachers present demonstrated behaviors that showed that they were empowered to make a variety of decisions which impacted students. These decisions included designing specific interventions for students who struggled academically and creating common assessments for students in the grade level curriculum. I detailed the 3rd grade PLC later in the findings. In addition, I observed distributed leadership in the school through observation of student-teacher conferences regarding writing, where teachers were given considerable responsibility to connect with students,

similar to Spillane's view on sharing power (Harris & Spillane, 2008, Spillane, 2003).

Four times per year Seneca engages in a school-wide writing day. All teachers work with students to produce writing samples which are assessed by teachers. The following week teachers hold one on one conferences and provide feedback to students on their writing using the Six Traits rubric. Teachers are provided substitutes out of the school based Title I budget. Teachers hold conferences in a variety of locations on the campus, in the library, in classrooms and some teachers were outside with students. I observed conferences with two 3rd grade teachers, Jody and George. Jody discussed the importance of using Thinking Maps. "Every kid must do a thinking map," she explained. George told a student, "You got me hooked, but I need more of a description of the character...The idea of the [thinking] map is to keep you focused." Karen and I visited several student/teacher conferences, and teachers were engaged in different types of conversations with students with feedback for writing, yet all of the teachers took the leadership responsibility to make the writing days function. Karen explained that doing the writing days was "tight," and how teachers did it was "loose" (Dufour, R. P., Dufour, R., Eaker, R. and Karhanek, G., 2004).

**Learner centered leadership.** Learner centered leadership (LCL) had a slightly higher frequency than distributed leadership with 34 coded responses. However, only one question had a frequency of more than 50% of the interview participants, question 12, which asked teachers how they have modified their

educational practices since arriving at Seneca. Some of the terms identified as descriptors for learner centered leadership (data, assessments, student accountability, tests, benchmarks) indicate assessment practice as part of the work teachers perform. Learner centered leadership described how teachers responded to student assessment, using data for their own professional learning and the ability to modify instruction as a result of examining data, not the practice of assessment in and of itself. Pat described how she learned the importance of changing her practice with students, describing how Craig suggested that she take a particular training because, "You are the only teacher that did not sign up for the training." Pat described the impact; "If you walk into a classroom, everyone is doing what they should be doing." George incorporated the use of data in his response, "We look at multiple data sources with reading." Jody described that learner centered leadership had meant that she was "much more standards driven now." Francisca shared, "I never saw myself as a leader, but now, I am stretching myself." She described her current focus on cognitive coaching and leadership as an example of learner centered leadership. Luanne explained the importance of her view of the classroom; "Kids need to be well-rounded. My job is to help them get there, walk them through. Sometimes they [the parents] think we are doing too much....We need to stay focused, do what we have to do to be ready for AIMS."

In question five, Bob talked about the importance of teachers creating common assessments, working with technology and making sure that student

learning was dictated by assessments. Francisca stated, "We are a team, we share common goals and expectations...We do a few things really well instead of doing too many things ok." She elaborated on the importance of getting better with the current practices, in her view, based upon teacher leadership working with the administration. Denise mentioned the importance of working with special education students as a team approach, with "more of a push to get kids here to meet the benchmarks." She described a culture that was about all individuals learning and decision-making more democratic. Luanne concluded, "We have similar expectations and we talk to each other. We want to learn from each other and we are here for the kids." She cited the articulation day as a key example where teachers work with one another across grade levels. As an example, 2nd grade teachers work with 3rd grade teachers. During this day, teachers examine student achievement data and make decisions on modifications to the curriculum based upon the needs of the students. Teachers negotiate with one-another on how best to design instruction. The 3rd grade teachers provide feedback to the 2nd grade teachers regarding instructional practices that would improve student achievement at the 3rd grade level. The description of LCL from teachers was consistent with the literature review (Danzig et al., 2007; Lieberman et al., 2007; Whalstrom & Lewis, 2008).

### **Additional Themes that Emerged**

Two additional themes emerged through the study that had not been identified discretely in the literature review process. Instructional focus and trust

emerged as themes in the study, identified by examining question responses of high co-occurrence. By examining interview responses with high frequencies in multiple categories (responses greater than 10 coded to two or more sub themes), triangulated with observations and interviews with non-teacher participants, these additional themes emerged.

### **Instructional Focus**

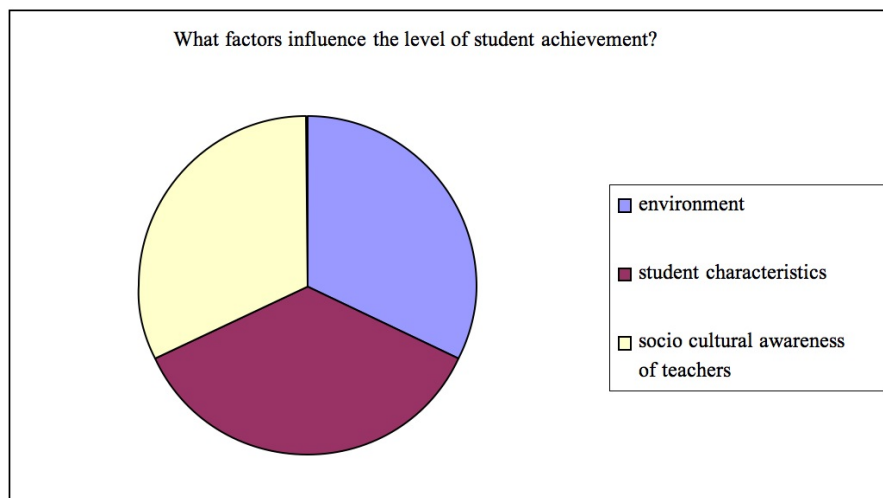
Seneca Elementary School teachers who participated in the study understood the school's essential mission. The majority of the teachers interviewed stated that they considered the focus on core programs and implementation with fidelity and integrity important factors for their quality of professional life. For the purpose of this study, I used a definition of focus from the Oxford Dictionary (1997) defining focus as the "center of interest or activity." For teachers, this ability to perform their professional duties within a school setting that minimized disruption or distraction emerged as a factor in the quality of professional life of teachers. The literature review on principal leadership and vision is fairly consistent. Principals that demonstrate and articulate vision for their school impact the quality of learning for students (Dufour, 1999, Dufour et al. 2004, Spillane et al., 2003). For teachers, however, the importance of focus and its impact on quality of professional life appeared as a factor in the study.

#### **Instructional focus as a co-occurrence influencing student**

**achievement.** Interview question seven asked teachers to identify the factors that influence student achievement. All 12 participants responded to student



characteristics, and 11 participants responded to both environment and socio-cultural awareness of teachers (Figure 2). The consistency of responses and the different terminology associated with the themes support the emergence of focus as a factor influencing the quality of professional life. George's response, "It is a triad, students, teachers and parents working together," summarized the relation between the three sub themes and the emergence of focus. He concluded, "Consistency means a greater chance of success with the possibility of intervention." Jody described the importance of focus, "Even if you have to give up that unit you have always been doing." Lisa shared the importance of students setting goals and being accountable for their own learning. Bob believed in the importance of families being supportive of learning. Carolyn emphasized the need to keep kids on track, "keeping after them constantly."



*Figure 2.* Focus as Co-Occurrence of Environment, Student Characteristics and Socio-Cultural Awareness of Teachers

**Instructional focus as modeled by principal leadership.** Over the course of the study I spent significant time with the principal, Karen. In my role as Assistant Superintendent, we had dealt with some challenging issues, including the death of two teachers and the impact on students and staff, an allegation of inappropriate conduct involving a teacher and students, which led to a resignation by the teacher, a police investigation but no criminal or legal charges, and a variety of day to day issues that are typical in schools including staffing, evaluation of teachers, professional development and termination or transfer of employees. This relationship and the potential concern regarding the role of the researcher versus the role of the Assistant Superintendent helped to create a trust as the researcher with Karen that allowed her to be candid in her conversations with me.

Karen had spent her professional teaching and administrative life in the Seneca School District, has children that have attended Seneca schools and has a variety of connections and relationships that indicate a strong sense of community and commitment. She has a leadership style that is both engaging and comforting, and yet also demanding. I observed this style in several settings, including watching daily interactions with staff, several informal meetings and conversations, observation at faculty meetings, conducting the school-wide flag raising ceremony, cafeteria duty, and phone conversations. During one conversation, the focus on leadership became evident as a guiding principle for Karen.

During this conversation, I asked Karen to describe what values she held on behalf of Seneca and its school, and to describe what that meant. She stated that they "stick with our six programs and do them well. I can't know nineteen programs, but I can know six." She described each of the six programs and used Accelerated Reader as an example. Seneca has several special education classes that include self-contained autism and learning resource. Her expectation is that students in these classes are responsible for fully utilizing the same core programs, modified to meet the needs of the students, but that a student at Seneca, regardless of the classroom, designation or individual challenges needs to be learning within the same curricular framework as all the other students. She described conversations with teachers, especially when they are new to Seneca, sharing with the new teachers that they need to be fully on board with the school based programs. "I know that the District wants us to publicize our 'specialized program,' but we don't have one. We are not fluff. No theme, these are just best practices."

Karen shared that she learned this idea of staying true to the core programs, using them with fidelity, as a value held by the previous principal (Craig). Karen spent several years working with Craig as the assistant principal, and was named principal three years ago after Craig left to take a position as an assistant superintendent in another area school district. She described the focus as something that Craig just did, that he was very business like, and that he expected people to do their work as professionals and did not micro-manage, but that he

also held them accountable. Karen stated that her first meeting with her faculty after being named principal was a succinct and focused meeting:

When I was named principal, I told the staff that I was not going to change, and that we needed to keep our focus. I think they really appreciated that, and that is what we are doing. There are things that I do differently than Craig, and I make sure they see that the cup is always half full. They [teachers] want us [school leaders] to be calm in these difficult times. It sucks to have 32 kids in a class.

**Instructional focus as modeled by school leadership.** Seneca has a structure called the Seneca Professional Learning Community (Seneca PLC). This team is composed of the principal (Karen), assistant principal (Nina), school psychologist (Ron), Title I reading specialist (Sharon), the instructional coach (Francisca), an ELD teacher (Colleen), and other teachers as appropriate, including a teacher on assignment to support English Language Learners and their teachers. The team meets weekly on Wednesday mornings before school. Although the team is led by the principal, in observation it was clear that leadership moved around the room based upon the conversation and which person had information concerning students. This was an example of distributed leadership at the school. All of the participants had the same sets of materials; an agenda and a printout of a data base that included student achievement data on every one of the 694 students in the school. What follows is a description of a portion of one meeting where the Seneca PLC functioned as a team with instructional focus on students.

The team discussed the status of a 6th grade student, Juan, who had been identified as struggling with academics. In a free fashion, individuals around the

room commented on information they knew about Juan. They know his mother was "on meds" and that the mom had previously refused some of the additional support available for the student, which included coming to school early to participate in some academic support. The Title I reading specialist, Sharon, stated that she had spoken to dad and that there now seemed to be more hope for getting him the academic support he needed. The team concluded that more follow-up would be needed, and that they should set a meeting up between the teacher, the parents and a member of the Seneca PLC to get things squared away. According to Karen, "If they don't want to drink the Kool-Aid, we can't help their kid."

A quick transition to another student produced the following exchange:

- Karen: Let's talk about 6th grade today. I know they want to get the students to M-Team, but we need to see where we are. Can we talk about Susana?
- Francisca: When I talked with her she was just dumping, boy drama, home drama, why she came to Seneca, she needed someone to talk to. She needed a psychologist.
- Sharon: Is she the one whose brother pulled his tooth out?
- Francisca: I heard it was a permanent tooth.
- Sharon: They had said that but it was a baby tooth.
- Francisca: She said, "At my other school I was really smart, here I am dumb."

The team looked at the data on the student, and Karen got up and opened the door, asking one of the office staff if she had been pulled in for AR (Accelerated Reader). Karen indicated that she would be brought in for AR, based upon looking at her reading scores and they would do some progress monitoring.

- Karen: Hopefully, it is beginner's bad luck.

The team transitioned quickly to another student, Frank, and began with looking at his AIMS data. They had information going back several years, including data on as early as first grade from another school.

- Sharon: There is a gap. It is a 60 day gap. It appears he went to Mexico.
- Karen: He went to Gallup [school] in 4th, and Sunrise [school] in 5th. Let's look at his report card. It is in Spanish. Can you read what that says?
- Colleen: You can see all the Ns, they are the same in Spanish. This comment is cut off, but it looks like something to do with continuing to provide support and intervention.
- Karen: He wants to learn.
- Sharon: Should he be retained?
- Karen: In 05-06 he was in Kindergarten.
- Sharon: What is his birthday?
- Karen: 1998.
- Colleen: That makes him 12.
- Sharon: He was probably already retained.
- Karen: Here is something from here. Petty theft from last year. Nina, this is your record.
- Francisca: He is so cute. That is his problem. He gets away with it.
- Karen: There are [discipline] records in here from first grade.
- Colleen: He is a ping-pong ball.
- Sharon: He recently got glasses. He has been blind so long.
- Colleen: He is proficient. He tested out of EIS [English Immersion Studies]. Do we want to consider him for comp. ed.?
- Karen: Do you want me to invite him to before school? Can you sneak him in? Into a group to monitor?
- Colleen: Yes, do I need to notify the parent?

Karen again gets up, moves to the door and asks the office staff to see if Frank has been invited to the before school support program. They conclude that he will be added for this support. The group then deliberately shifts gear to a different part of the meeting.

Karen: I have a success story. I want to talk about Jason. He is a good kid. He is a new kid [since the intervention]! He seems to be carrying himself so well!

Ron: He never had a good self-concept.

Karen: He needs to continue with male role models. Call Bill [male PE teacher] to stop by. They need to connect. I have another one. We fixed Michael. Teachers were nailing him too much.

Nina: He wants to play football.

Karen: His father is a fire fighter. Dad wants to be on campus.

Nina: He was really excited.

Karen: Let PE know. He was very respectful at the IPT. I drew the line in the sand. I said, 'whoa, whoa, whoa, you need to stop!' Dad has learned a lot. He has been humbled.

Sharon: The 6th grade teachers went to the meeting, then they let their breath out.

Karen: I said, "We're done."

The team discussed two more students, then Ron shared some new graphs he had done charting reading and math scores. He showed several examples of individual students and how they were progressing compared to where their goals were. Francisca teased him, "You just want to show off that you are using your new computer. Did you go through the training [District required]?" Ron quickly replied, "Shush, what training?" The team then left the meeting, with teachers and administrators reporting to various locations for morning duty prior to the beginning of school. By the exchanges with the participants, the tone of the meeting, and the continual conversation regarding individual students, it was evident that the instructional focus was clear and consistent. Each time the team discussed a student, the person who had information to share felt free to update the team, provide for suggestions, and look at the various factors that influenced how the student was doing academically. With each student discussed, the focus

always returned to academics, even though the concerns often dealt with behavioral issues, background, language or other factors. For Juan, his mobility, the lengthy gap in attendance (over 60 days the previous school year), the identification of behavioral issues, and the revelation of a new pair of glasses culminated in the recommendation to meet with the parents and place Juan into a morning program to provide additional support for reading. As another example, the Seneca PLC discussed Susana, revealing some self-esteem issues, transition from her previous school to Seneca, and a struggle with academics. They targeted her for reading intervention, but for different reasons, addressing her self-esteem by working on her academics; "At my old school, I was really smart. Here I am dumb." The team caught this important statement from the student and determined that the core intervention to address her low self-esteem was academic success through improving her reading.

The team also spent time acknowledging the successes they had, from a standpoint of sharing progress on students that have had different types of interventions and clear results from the interventions. The two examples cited also demonstrated the connection to core academics, but in each case the principal made it very clear with parents what the expectations were for success at Seneca, yet inviting the parents into the school and building relationships that would support academic achievement. With Jason, they identified some role model issues, and immediately looked at ways to connect him with male teachers. Additional information revealed that Jason had a brother who was important to



him that was at times in and out of his life. This immediate identification of his emotional well-being indicated an understanding of the students as people, beyond the academic achievement. Yet, the team determined the intervention needed base upon reviewing his academic data. They started with academic data, looked at the variables that may have impacted academic achievement, drew conclusions on the intervention, and returned to the impact on academic achievement based upon the intervention. With Michael, they did more work with the father, with a sense that their responsibility was to educate him on the importance of the school focus for his son, and that if Michael was to be successful, everyone needed to understand and buy-in to the core academic programs at Seneca. By looking at the relational aspects with Michael's father as a fire fighter and Michael's love of football, the team identified an opportunity to create a strong connection with Michael and potentially other students by entering into a volunteer opportunity with his father to become more engaged at the school by helping develop a safe football program with kids. Karen stated, "We need to make it clear that we want him to focus on sportsmanship." In a brief conversation after the meeting with Karen, she stated, "I would love to have the fire fighters in my school. It could be such a gift for our kids."

The Pima PLC served as an example of instructional focus, with visible aspects of distributed leadership. The purpose of the meeting, addressing student learning and providing interventions for students who achieved below expectations, brought teachers and administrators together through collaboration.

Once a student had been identified for intervention, specific actions by the Pima PLC members would follow, and then the team would meet the following week to continue to monitor progress and identify other students for assistance.

Although not observed, one drawback from this type of intervention could be the labeling or identification of students that could have inadvertent negative consequences. Students could be categorized a certain way based upon review by the Pima PLC, then sorted based upon the individual categorization. The data sets used by the team include student name, home language, student test scores, special education status, gifted status, intervention status and other information. Having these types of data could lead to labeling of students, potentially creating self-fulfilling prophecies for student achievement.

**Instructional focus as modeled by teacher leadership.** Karen set the expectations of teacher leadership for the school. "Let people be leaders. Give them leadership responsibility." She stated that Seneca had a very strong staff, that there are "very few weak links," that the staff is strong and composed of good people. According to Karen, if she modeled teacher leadership expectations by meeting with kids and reviewing their academics, then it would translate into the same leadership practice for teachers; "I meet with kids. They [teachers and students] need to see me in that light. We go over what is acceptable and what is not acceptable regarding academic expectations."

According to teachers, there is a consistent belief that teachers are expected to exercise teacher leadership, and that the leadership is focused on the

six academic core programs. As an example, I observed the third grade PLC at one of its regularly scheduled meetings on an early release day in December. The PLC consisted of seven members; three grade level teachers, the Title I reading specialist (Sharon), a PE teacher, two special education teachers (learning resource – Denise) all focused on grade level student achievement. The PLC facilitator, George, led the conversation. "When you looked at AIMS from last year, was there anything that jumped out at you?" The conversation addressed Essential Performance Objectives (EPOs) in math. The team had a focused conversation on student achievement in math, parallel to the conversation between the members of the Seneca PLC I had observed earlier. The teachers shared instructional ideas with one-another, and were in the process of creating a common understanding of the EPOs, and a common assessment to be used across the grade level. By including the special education and PE teachers, it was clear that student achievement, as viewed by the grade level teachers in third grade, touched all students and in non-core academic areas like PE. Jody asked the group if they wanted to have any vocabulary as part of the common assessment. Sharon suggested that an effective approach with students is to have them explain their process in how they solved a particular math problem. They referenced the Seneca PLC as providing specific information to the grade level PLC and how they felt the school leadership guidance, resulting in implementation of effective instructional practices by the grade level PLC and the individual teachers. The team divided up work assignments on different components of preparation for

math and the EPOs for their next meeting, with each teacher taking an assignment. George commented to the PE teacher, "By taking measurement, that is right up your alley." The special education teachers shared that consistency of format would be helpful for special education students, and that the team should consider a way to incorporate this consistency with students. The team concluded that one strategy they should collectively engage in is "test awareness." They described test awareness are more than just test-taking strategies, that it included being able to understand the purpose of a particular format, consistency with tests that look like AIMS, and the needed skills for students to demonstrate the ability to transfer their knowledge between different types of formats for assessment. During the entire observation the team remained very focused on student achievement, and at times struggled with talking over one-another to share thoughts or ideas. Aligned with the same type of review of student achievement data at the grade level, this meeting demonstrated learner centered leadership where the teachers navigated the meeting as a collaborative team, with democratic decision-making as part of their process. I observed a collegial and professional conversation.

**Instructional focus as demonstrated with other school activities.** As a school, Seneca has few classroom disruptions due to assemblies or outside activities. Two exceptions exist; the monthly flag-raising ceremony, and the annual assembly with motocross. The flag-raising assembly occurs in the morning before instruction begins, generally lasting for no more than fifteen or

twenty minutes. The ceremony honors the raising of the American flag, along with Arizona flag. Students present the colors, the national anthem is either played or sung, and a few announcements or brief speech from the principal is part of the ceremony. I have observed the ceremony on several occasions. In comparison to many other schools within the District, Seneca has few exceptions to changing of routine and focus on instruction.

### **Trust**

Three interview questions resulted in high responses coded to environment and social factors (questions 5, 8 and 14). Figure 3 shows the specific frequencies for each question. The co-occurrence of high frequency responses suggests that trust exists as a factor in the quality of professional life for teachers. Bryk and Schneider described relational trust as having respect, personal regard, competence in core role responsibilities and personal integrity (2003). Although trust was not identified as a theme during the literature review, comments from participants and triangulation with parent interviews and principal interviews substantiate trust as a factor. Participants described factors that aligned with Bryk and Schneider's definition of trust as described earlier in the findings (2003). The success that teachers felt at Seneca and the evidence of trust are consistent with Tschannen-Moran and Hoy's findings regarding the efficacy of schools and the impact of trust (2000), where they conclude, "Trust makes a difference in student achievement, teachers' collective sense of efficacy, and overall school effectiveness. If schools are to function well, they need trust," (p. 584).

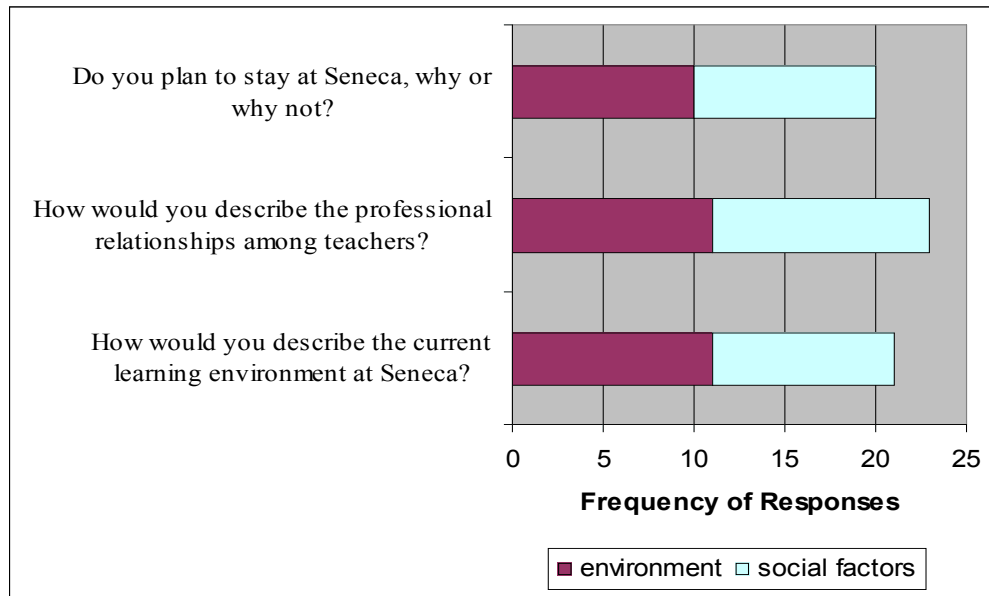


Figure 3. Trust as Co-Occurrence of Environment and Social Factors

**Trust as co-occurrence in interview responses.** Although trust did not emerge as a key word coded for interview responses, teachers described components of trust that they believe existed within the school and demonstrated by teacher relationships with one another (social factors) and within the school environment. Although not directly related to co-occurrence frequencies with principal leadership, the link could be tied to principal leadership as contributing to trust (Table 9). The foundation of this link is related to principal leadership as a supporting factor for quality of professional life for teachers (satisfier). This finding is consistent with Tschannen-Moran's findings of high levels of trust within the faculty correlated to high levels of trust with the principal, "that teachers demonstrate greater professionalism where leaders demonstrate a

professional orientation and where greater trust is evident throughout the organization," (2009, p. 239). Tschannen-Moran concluded that when teachers had flexibility and less rigidity with rules, they were more likely to demonstrate a greater level of trust with the principal (2009). At Seneca, staff demonstrated trust, yet the school culture had a clear focus on instructional programs for students. The balance between flexibility for teachers appears to be inconsistent within the context of teacher input and teacher control over curriculum and instruction (dissatisfiers) in relation to trust. Yet, clearly trust existed as a factor contributing to quality of professional life.

Participants responded to describing the current learning environment that demonstrated trust with question five. Consistent references to collective teacher behavior (we, all) indicated a set of behaviors exhibited by the whole staff as compared to individual teachers. These types of descriptions were consistent with Rogoff's categorization of participatory appropriation (1995). Jody stated that "people are working together." Francisca's comment, "We are thriving, not just treading water," and Carolyn's description of Seneca as "a special place," suggested that teachers felt secure in the work environment based upon the factors identified in the study. Research suggests that the principal sets the tone for the quality of relationships within a school (Bryk & Schneider, 1996; Tschannen-Moran, 2009). Luanne's observation, that "teachers want to share with one-another," and Susan's belief that teachers saw her program as "a legitimate part of the learning at Seneca," further support the trust that existed at the school. Trust

included teachers' trust in Karen as the instructional leader in the school, and trust in colleagues as professionals.

Lisa provided a synopsis of the professional relationships of teachers and the school, with the comparison of the school to a family, and that "we are all in this together, all our kids and the principal." Francisca shared her perspective and described Seneca as a school that was different from her other experiences and that Seneca was collaborative and not competitive. She believed the competition at other schools was something that created conflict. Goddard, Tschannen-Moran and Hoy draw the connection between trust and its effect on student achievement (2001), where they suggest that, "trust makes schools better places to learn..." (p. 14). Sharon commented that "We all talk to each other. We all get along very well." According to Susan, in relying on her colleagues, "I could call on anyone." These statements helped identify trust as a contributing factor for quality of professional life.

When teachers were asked if they intended to stay at Seneca, the strongest evidence of trust emerged based upon the co-occurrence of sub themes of environment and social factors identified in the responses. With Lisa as the only teacher who stated her intent to retire at the end of the year, the consensus response to teachers and the conviction of their responses identified a positive work environment with trusting relationships with colleagues. "I can't imagine a better staff to work with. I am successful," stated Lisa. Susan referred to Seneca as "a dream job." Francisca referred to Seneca as family and Carolyn called



Seneca her home, all indicative of a trust within the environment. Luanne attached that trust directly with her principal, stating that she would stay at Seneca "as long as Karen is here." Research supports trust as a factor related to student achievement (Bryk & Schneider, 1996, 2003; Goddard et al., 2001; Tschannen-Moran, 2009), yet trust as a factor in working conditions and teacher retention appears to be an area with little research as it relates to quality of professional life for teachers. Trust in this context could be viewed as a satisfier, as it relates to the supporting factors for quality of professional life as identified by teachers found in principal leadership and social factors.

**Trust and the perceptions of two engaged parents.** I met with Grace and Matt for coffee to get their perception of Seneca. Matt and Grace live in the Seneca community, have two sons who attended Seneca and now attend Sidwinder Middle School, and have a third son who attends Seneca, currently in 5th grade. Matt and Grace are very active parents, both serving on school or District committees, including the committee that recently organized a successful campaign to pass \$118 million bond election to rebuild the District's middle schools. They can be considered insiders to some degree within the Seneca school community due to their role and engagement. In interviews, some teachers have mentioned their names in connection to parent support and involvement.

According to Matt, engaged parents do homework to learn about schools. He cited his own research on effective schools, mentioning the Morrison Institute's "Beating the Odds" study (2006) that influenced his thinking on

schools.<sup>19</sup> One premise of the report is accountability; "Beat-the-odds schools emphasize the achievement of every student in every classroom *and* take responsibility for that performance," (Waits, M.J., Campbell, H., Gau, R., Jacobs, E., Rex, T., & Hess, R., 2006, p. 25). Matt stated, "If schools followed the Beat-the-odds report and Collins' 'Good to Great,' they would be much more effective." He referenced a nearby middle school Lane, a school that has struggled with academic achievement and adequate yearly progress for several years, as a school that could use that type of focus delineated in the report. Matt and Grace made the decision to send their sons to a different middle school instead of Lane, even though Lane is in their attendance boundary. They explained their choice as being based upon 1) the quality of the school program, 2) geographic location – proximity to their home, and 3) the school label.

Grace and Matt responded to the question, "Why did you choose Seneca Elementary School for your children?" They provided an in depth response. They first addressed the fact that Seneca is their neighborhood school, and they feel strongly about going there. When asked if they would have their children attend Seneca if it were not an excelling school, their answer shifted, and they stated that they wanted an excelling school, and that if they would have to travel to a different school nearby, had Seneca not had a strong academic reputation, they would have done so. Their decision to send their older sons to a different

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<sup>19</sup> Retrieved from <http://morrisoninstitute.asu.edu/publications-reports/BeatTheOdds-SomeSchoolsWithLatinoChildrenDoWell-SomeDont/view> on 12/16/2010.

middle school outside of their attendance area verified this belief. They provided several examples of the quality of education they believed their sons had received at Seneca, and each example involved descriptions of teachers and what they did communicating with students and developing relationships with students and parents. One teacher, a former teacher of gifted students who had transferred, was described as "the epitome of a teacher that engaged parents." Grace and Matt related that this teacher would do home visits with parents and engage them in the decision-making process regarding the education of their children. Building trust with parents supports student achievement (Goddard et al., 2001). Another reference mentioned the strength of a teacher in the area of writing, and that they acknowledged her expertise, "my students are great students, and she [the teacher] is so into it, it brings a tear to my eye."

"Our teachers are great! They are professionals." Grace and Matt described the current attitude of teachers as one that demonstrates a focus on education in spite of a variety of challenges they see. Grace related her perceptions of teachers and their quality of professional life as impacted by class size. She had heard some concerns regarding the increases in class size, but never any complaints. Matt described teachers as being very focused, and that they are "chinning it," handling challenges and adversity and "making no excuses." They both believed having a successful school made it easier during difficult times.

Grace described being an active volunteer at the school and her perceptions of the relationships between teachers and parents. "I understand why,

sometimes, teachers don't want parents in the classroom. They [teachers] don't always know what they will get with some parents." She intimated that in several conversations over the years with teachers, she understood that sometimes teachers may have had negative experiences with parents, and teachers had described some parents as unreliable or having engaged inappropriate conversations about students with other teachers or parents. In addition, she described the process that Seneca used for placement of students in May for the following year. Parents were invited into teacher classrooms to observe teachers for the next grade level. In her particular experience, she observed 5th grade teachers to determine which teacher(s) she thought would be the best match for her son upon completion of 4th grade. "We trust teachers and chose a teacher that would be stronger in writing."

When asked to describe their perceptions of teachers and the impact of increased class size, Grace and Matt shared that the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) decided to focus on supporting teachers and teacher morale for this school year. The relationship between parents and teachers allows for a stronger school community (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). They had heard about the District initiative to help reduce the work load of teachers and employees and wanted to be supportive of their teachers. Grace stated that the PTO had discovered, however, that reduction of work load was not that simple. "Parents want to help, with bulletin boards and other things, but one teacher wanted to know how she could get 'a Santa elf' into her class to help." She explained that trying to get consistent

and coordinated support from parent volunteers doesn't always work. Grace stated, "The parents see the difference in class size, but the kids don't. They don't know any better. They come to school and learn." She equated the increase in class sizes as the most evident factor in teacher workload.

Grace and Matt shared their expectations of their children and education. Grace grew up going to Catholic school and had no experience with public school. Matt, who works as a business consultant, views education from a marketing perspective. They collectively described Seneca as a school with high expectations, and these expectations matched their own. As an example, Grace shared an experience she observed one day in the office at school. A student was crying as she came in late. The school is extremely firm on tardiness and absenteeism. "The kid was in tears, and I felt so bad, but the school did not bend the rules." Matt shared that he understood the impact of this type of consistency. "The school believes in high expectations, no excuses, regardless. Everyone has their own story. You have to say 'no'...keep regimented and structured." He also related to their own experience regarding an incident of tardiness and one morning when they were late getting to school, "Holy crap! This school means business!" after a pause, he concluded, "We were never late again." They described Seneca as "having a reputation," and that discipline and structure are critical to the learning environment. They shared that some of the parents who have taken their children out of Seneca may look at this as a negative, but for them, it clearly sets the expectation that "they mean business."

During the spring of 2008, the school had been considered for consolidation, which may have meant the school would have closed and combined with another school. The community rallied and through a campaign organized by parents and supported by many staff members, successfully led an organizing campaign that influenced the school board to take consolidation or closing of Seneca off the table at that time. I asked Matt and Grace if they felt that the possible closure strengthened the connection between teachers and the community or if the connection had already been there. They were unsure, but felt that the community and teacher interaction was always very good, and that one of the most powerful attributes of the school was that access to teachers that parents had to support learning. The end result for Seneca staying open and not being consolidated may have had an impact in uniting the school community. They attended the monthly flag raising ceremonies where scout leaders participate, described PTO and parent meetings and listed other activities which connect to teachers and the school, including neighborhood sports leagues like soccer which use the school's fields in the afternoons and on weekends. "You learn so much on the soccer field." They concluded the interview with a concern that the continued budget cuts at the state legislature have teachers and the community worried that the issue of consolidation or school closing will come up again.

In describing their decision to send their children to Seneca during our interview, I summarized some of the characterizations shared from Matt and

Grace. They described their perception of what is a quality school by referring to the Beat the Odds (2006) as their criteria. The study has its supporters and skeptics. But for these two parents, they focused on what they saw as the positive indicators that they attributed to Seneca. They also described teachers as "professionals." From their perspective this included high levels of expectations for students, demonstrated empathy and a commitment to go beyond the every day expectations. The examples they provided, the teacher who did home visits and the teacher who was so committed to the writing process that she elicited emotional responses represented the definition of professional.

**Trust and the perceptions of the former principal.** Dr. Craig Vaughn served ten years as principal at Seneca. The school began its academic success under his leadership. According to Craig, the story really began prior to his arrival. He described Seneca as a school that had been led by the same principal for twenty years, with complacency, lack of cohesion and leadership filled by teachers who did not have the best interest of students at the center of their decision-making. Craig described a quality of professional life that was poor and adult centered. According to Craig, the environment was clearly teacher centered and not learner centered:

A small group of teachers ran the place. They were not real happy with me when I arrived. We started putting in accountability pieces, and made many of them very uncomfortable. Many retired or left, and those that stayed got with the program. By the end of the second or third year we had changed the culture. There was not a lot of leadership, and we had to change the attitude to "no excuses." We don't care what backgrounds are there for kids. The hardest thing was the high mobility rate. One year it was over 50%. That is really hard.

During some of the teacher interviews, references had been made stating that Craig had helped teachers to become "professionals." I asked Craig what this meant to him:

We found programs that worked and we stuck with them, done with fidelity, Accelerated Reader, Thinking Maps. We don't keep trying new things, we stick with what works and do it better. We looked at teachers as becoming the experts, doing it better and better. We created a common school goal. Teachers could all tell you what they were working on. All were on the same page and sharing data.

Craig described the biggest cultural change regarding student assessment and data. They had been utilizing the "Beat the Odds" study with the staff. "The big culture change was looking at each other's data. It was hard looking at another teacher's data. 'What are you doing?' Now it is no big deal, looking at each other's data. It is the way they do business now." Tschannen-Moran states, "For principals who are interested in building a professional orientation in their schools, a productive strategy would include intentionally cultivating trust in their relationships with teachers," (2009, p. 242). By the accounts of teachers and from Dr. Vaughn, that occurred at Seneca. Teachers examined student achievement data, and teachers who had higher levels of student achievement began sharing strategies that appeared to be effective for their students with other teachers. It took time to develop relationships and trust for teachers to feel comfortable talking about student achievement data, but over the course of time, Craig described that teachers began to do so once they realized the conversations were about the students and not about the teachers.



He also described a shift in how teachers looked at students, "They are *our* kids, rather than 'his' or 'her' or 'their' kids." The collective responsibility started with student data and included any types of intervention or support that would lead to gains in academic achievement.

We had a different view on the use of data than the other Title I schools. The Title I school meetings were tough. We were looked at with suspicion, sometimes hostility. We had a different mindset; data on instruction versus the notion of social services. Instruction, that is what we are here for. Maybe we didn't do enough with social services, but we had "no excuses." Kids were going to learn no matter what.

Craig shared that once there was a belief among teachers in accountability and achievement data from AIMS, and then the focus went to students being responsible for their own learning. They instituted a practice that involved conferencing with students and setting goals on AIMS. "The other Title I schools had trouble with this. Karen [the current principal] has continued the practice and it sounds like they are doing even more than we did."

Craig's last point connecting with quality of professional life for teachers involved cohesiveness of the staff. "For new teachers to the school, if they don't get with the program, they have a tough time with teachers." He described the staff as very professional, having open communication with one another. He saw his role as principal running interference wherever needed for teachers to focus on students. "It's all about the kids, not about the staff." He stated that one of the intriguing components was very low involvement with the local teacher's association (union). "For several years they couldn't even get someone to be the building rep. The negative ones [teachers] all had some connection with the

union, but not officers or anything like that. I always thought they were too focused on the adults and not on the kids." He summed up the school as being one where everyone is treated respectfully, teachers and students, an environment that is orderly and has minimal interruptions to instruction with a focus on the basics. "Seneca runs very smoothly."

**Trust and humor.** Although Seneca is an extremely focused school, the environment demonstrates a level of trust that allows staff to demonstrate a little levity. Typically, Seneca staff, like many schools, celebrates with a holiday party during the month of December. The staff at Seneca chose to forgo the party and instead focus some of that energy to support a teacher who later died from cancer. They did, however, have their December staff meeting where Bob shared his song-writing talent and wrote a parody about Karen sung to the tune of "Rudolf the Red-Nosed Reindeer" (Appendix C). I had missed the faculty meeting but received a personal rendition of the song from Bob and Susan. Later in conversation Karen laughed and took the parody as intended, as the staff's way of showing affection, and yet, the trust allowed this type of interaction to occur.

### **Summary of Findings**

This chapter summarized the findings and results that describe the quality of professional life of teachers at Seneca Elementary School. The key factors that teachers identified as satisfiers included principal leadership and social factors. Teachers identified teacher lack of input and lack of teacher control over curriculum and instruction as dissatisfiers, consistent with motivation-hygiene

theory (Herzberg et al. 1993). Environment, social factors, teacher identity and student characteristics had the highest frequency rates for responses to teacher interview questions. Conversely, teacher input, teacher control over curriculum and instruction and practical factors had the lowest frequency responses. Practical factors were mostly associated as negative responses for teachers addressing district requirements for PLCs and the concern with large class sizes.

Co-occurrence between environment, student characteristics and socio-cultural awareness suggest the theme of focus that emerged through analysis of the data. Focus may be related to vision as supported by principal leadership, but exhibited as a factor influencing the quality of professional life of teachers.

A second instance of co-occurrence, environment and social factors, had high co-occurrence in relation to describing the learning environment at Seneca, the professional relationship with teachers and future plans of teachers to stay at the school. This co- occurrence suggests the existence of trust as a contributing factor in the quality of professional life for teachers. Chapter 5 will present the summary of the study, conclusions, key recommendations and implications for future research.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **Introduction**

Since the inception of accountability measures in public schools, significant change has occurred in education. These changes include state and national focus on student achievement as a result of *No Child Left Behind* and *Arizona Learns*, with increased scrutiny on student achievement in schools with high levels of poverty, identified as Title I schools. The body of research is consistent in describing the impact of working conditions on teacher retention, identifying factors that influence teachers' decisions to stay or leave a school, or the teaching profession all together. In general, higher attrition rates occur in schools with higher levels of poverty and with students identified as English Language Learners. Additional factors that impact teacher retention include the relationships with other teachers, the leadership of the principal and a sense of efficacy in working with students.

This study focused on teachers themselves, asking the question, what is the quality of professional life for teachers at an excelling Title I school? The research appears to ignore the basic conditions that impact quality of professional life for teachers beyond teacher retention. The study describes the quality of professional life for teachers and attempts to define the factors that influence quality of professional life at an excelling Title I school. The focus at this particular school and its unique characteristics should not be construed as an

application of viewing all teachers and their quality of professional life as universally applicable to all schools.

### **Summary of the Study**

The study sought to examine the quality of professional life for teachers in an excelling Title I school. With a total student population of 694 students, more than 50% free and reduced lunch, and having over 100 students with an identified home language other than English, Seneca Elementary School stands out as a school that has high levels of student achievement. The characteristics of the student population at Seneca are unique in terms of its achievement status, Excelling over the last eight years. The research suggests that high poverty schools and schools with challenging student characteristics have higher levels of teacher turnover. In addition, student achievement levels are associated with socio economic conditions and levels of poverty. Yet, within the context of examining teacher turnover, the research does not address the factors that are connected with quality of professional life for teachers. The theoretical framework, motivation-hygiene theory overlaid with socio cultural theory, provided the perspective of examining the components that contributed the quality of professional life of teachers. The methodology included examining school artifacts, observations, a brief open ended survey and interviews. The data was analyzed by creating a coding system and categorizing responses aligned with the themes and sub themes identified in the research. The coded responses were reviewed within the context of the school observations, review of artifacts and interviews with other

participants in the study not identified as teachers. Additional themes emerged that were not identified in the literature review and emerged as a result of co-occurrence frequencies (responses of two or more themes with of 10 or more responses) to interview questions.

### **Summary of Findings and Conclusions**

This section addresses the findings and conclusions for the factors that influence the quality of professional life for teachers. It is unclear if my role as researcher impacted the responses of participants in the study. As Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources, I have access to additional information concerning employees associated with personnel records and demographic data. My professional role has caused me to be involved with personnel issues at this school. In all instances, these personnel issues included only the principal at the school and did not involve any other participants in the study. In addition, personnel matters by their very nature are highly sensitive and are addressed confidentially unless compelled by law for disclosure. During interviews and observations, I did not observe any hesitancy from participants on their responses or any appearance of rehearsed or staged activity during observations. In fact, due to the nature of many of the observations as "unannounced," I could find no visible evidence of any altered behavior as a result of the study or my administrative responsibilities. In addition, I have no formal evaluation responsibilities for any of the participants in the study.

## **Research Question**

*What is the quality of professional life of teachers at one excelling Title I school?*

### **Summary**

Through the survey, interviews, observations and review of artifacts, the study established a definition of quality of professional life as "factors that influence a view of teaching as a valuable endeavor that has a strong sense of purpose and fulfillment" and the factors that contribute to quality of professional life. Teachers identified the greatest supports for quality of professional life (satisfiers) as principal leadership, environment and social factors. Teachers identified the greatest barriers (dissatisfiers) to quality of professional life as lack of teacher input and lack of teacher control over curriculum and instruction. These findings are consistent with Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory.

In addition, teachers identified environment, social factors, teacher professional identity, and student characteristics as having the greatest impact on quality of professional life for teachers. Two additional factors emerged as influencing the quality of professional life, instructional focus and trust. These themes were not identified in the literature review but emerged from the responses to interview questions and high frequency of co-occurrence.

### **Satisfiers**

According to the participants, the most important factor for support for quality of professional life was the principal. This finding is consistent with the body of research that identifies the importance of leadership in schools. Because

teachers identified the principal as support for quality of professional life, the impact of the principal may extend beyond what is associated with factors that contribute to teacher retention. Although teachers identified environment and social factors as satisfiers, their frequency was less than principal leadership. The identification of principal leadership by teachers also indicates the priority teachers place on leadership characteristics that support teachers in their work environment. Although leadership characteristics were not the focus of this study, teachers identified various leadership characteristics during their interviews.

### **Dissatisfiers**

Consistent with the literature, teachers reported the lack of teacher input and lack of teacher control over curriculum and instruction as barriers to quality of professional life. As established with motivation-hygiene theory, satisfiers and dissatisfiers were not mirror opposites in the study. Participants identified lack of input as having a locus of control at the school district level, as opposed to either the classroom or school level. In relation to principal leadership, lack of teacher input or control suggests that the principal was seen as intermediary and buffer between teachers and the school district. The relatively low frequency of responses in interview questions suggests, however, that teachers at Seneca did not identify lack of teacher input or lack of teacher control over curriculum and instruction as a significant factor contributing to the quality of professional life for teachers.



## **Principal Leadership**

The study found that principal leadership existed as a factor contributing to the quality of professional life for teachers. Although having a lower frequency rate of response compared to some other factors, principal leadership consistently emerged through out the interview question responses and observations. No single interview question had a higher frequency of response greater than 50% coded to principal leadership. However, the distribution of responses coded to principal leadership in 13 of the 16 questions indicates the importance of principal leadership as a factor in the quality of professional life for teachers. Principal leadership also emerged in the interviews with parents, the school secretary and observations at the school. This finding is further supported by the identification of perceptions of leadership as themes that had frequency rates of 32 for distributed leadership and 34 for learning centered leadership, although these themes were not directly tied to principal leadership. Several interview participants referenced the previous principal and the current principal as impacting the quality of their professional lives.

## **Environment**

The high frequency of environment responses indicated the importance of environment as a factor for quality of professional life for teachers. With five questions with high frequency response rates (10 or more responses) and the distribution of responses in 13 of the 16 interview questions, there was a clear indicator of its existence as a factor. This finding is consistent with the literature

regarding teacher retention and working conditions. At Seneca, teachers described a positive environment and connected the environmental concerns with their general satisfaction. The most common terms used by teachers included "focused," "high expectations," and "good/positive." The importance of environment and teacher retention was evident with the high response rate to teachers indicating their desire to stay at Seneca, and only one teacher indicated a desire to leave Seneca due to her pending retirement at the end of the school year.

### **Teacher Satisfaction and Social Factors**

Teachers consistently defined social factors as influencing their quality of professional life. The existence of social factors is consistent with socio cultural theory as part of the conceptual framework of the study. Teachers described their working relationships with colleagues as influencing their professional lives. Observations of the Seneca PLC and the 3rd Grade PLC indicated the existence of participatory appropriation (Rogoff, 1996). Teachers learned from each other as part of their collective activity in PLCs. The social factors also included the relationships that teachers had with the principal, assistant principal and other staff members at the school. Several teachers described the impact of social factors and how social relationships had improved over the course of time at the school.

With each of the teachers interviewed, there was no hesitation regarding answering the question about social factors. All teachers responded by describing their work with other teachers, indicative of an environment that appears to value

collaboration and communities of practice. The absence of a single response that indicated isolation or lack of connection with other teachers suggests to this researcher the impact of social factors in the school setting for quality of professional life for teachers. This finding was most evident in the responses from Denise (special education), Susan (vocal music), and Carolyn (visual art). All three described working with content area teachers, PLCs and connecting with their colleagues. Generally, the most isolated teachers in elementary school settings are teachers who do not typically work in grade level teams or may be the only teacher in the assignment or content area.

### **Teacher Professional Identity**

All of the participants related teacher professional identity as a factor that influenced the quality of professional life. Teacher professional identity had the highest frequency rate of all of the interview responses and had the greatest distribution among interview questions with 15 of the 16 questions having at least one response coded to teacher professional identity. The most intriguing component of professional identity emerged when teachers were asked if working at an excellent Title I school influenced their professional identity. Eleven of the 12 teachers indicated yes. This finding suggests the importance of feeling successful for teachers and quality of professional life. The most compelling comment came from Jody:

It does make me feel like I am playing on a winning team. And there are so many ways to feel like a failure on a regular basis as a teacher. At least that is my experience. It's nice to have something to point to, like 'maybe

this is not working in my classroom,' but overall across the board we are doing something that's successful.

This finding is important for teachers as it relates to the current environment in public education. Too often teachers are maligned for the state of public education and student achievement. Jody's comment indicates an awareness teachers have of school labels and how the success at Seneca mitigates some of the negative perceptions that exist in public education within urban schools and schools with high levels of poverty.

### **Student Characteristics**

The study found student characteristics existed as a factor impacting the quality of professional life for teachers. Thirteen of the 16 interview questions had one response or more coded to student characteristics. This finding is consistent with the literature review that identifies higher rates of teacher turnover at schools with higher rates of poverty. However, the rate of teacher turnover at Seneca, 5%, is lower than the national rate of teacher turnover identified by Ingersoll (2001) at 13.2%. With a retention rate of 95% in core content areas, Seneca retains teachers at a rate significantly higher than the national average and higher than the District average of 90% to 93%.

Teachers demonstrated an understanding of student characteristics but did not identify student characteristics either as a dissatisfier or negative factor impacting the quality of professional life. In fact, teachers discussed student characteristics more as a matter of fact condition of the school as opposed to a negative characteristic. Repeatedly, teachers identified the importance of

maintaining high standards regardless of the demographics of the student population. The absence of identification of student characteristics as either a negative factor or dissatisfier is evidence that students in this high poverty school were not viewed through the lens of a deficit model. The possibility may exist that teachers instead identified students and their *funds of knowledge* (Gonzalez, Andrade, Civil and Moll, 2001) as a factor in how teachers perceived students at Seneca. It could be that teachers at Seneca embrace practices at Seneca that view students as contributors of the knowledge base in the school and that students are "not only consumers of knowledge, but also producers..." (Gonzalez et al., 2001, p. 130).

One intriguing component of the study was the absence of any reference to home language issues by any of the participants. The majority of the students who identified English as a second language were native Spanish speakers. Several of the teachers interviewed were fluent in Spanish, yet no references occurred to second language learning as an issue impacting quality of professional life for teachers. The absence of any reference suggests that teachers did not identify language either as dissatisfier or barrier, nor a factor with a high level of awareness for teachers. This may also relate to Gee's description of identity, and that in this particular context teachers did not describe being functionally bilingual as part of their affinity grouping (2000-2001). According to Gee, "For members of an affinity group, their allegiance is *primarily* to a set of common endeavors or practices and *secondarily* to other people in terms of shared culture

or traits," (2000-2001, p. 105). Teachers at Seneca did not identify an affinity grouping with ELL students or their own ability to speak Spanish but instead identified their affinity group as a member of the Seneca staff in this excelling Title I school.

### **Instructional Focus**

Although absent from the literature review, focus emerged as a factor that influenced the quality of professional life for teachers at Seneca. The principal set the expectations for the school with her commitment to the core academic programs at Seneca. The former principal established this focus and over time teachers and parents understood and accepted focus as part of the learning environment. The Seneca PLC demonstrated focus as it reviewed the status of students and interventions to support student learning. The 3rd grade team demonstrated focus aligned with the school as it reviewed the status of its students and designed common assessments for math. Other evidence of focus as a factor for quality of professional life included the manner in which the school conducted its monthly flag raising ceremony and its student teacher conferences for writing.

The co-occurrence of environment, student characteristics and socio-cultural awareness of teachers also supported the existence of focus as a contributing factor in the quality of professional lives of teachers as identified in interview question seven. Key terms that supported focus included "consistency," "goals," and "vision." Teachers appeared to understand the connection among factors, as they related to impacting their quality of professional life.

## **Trust**

The emergence of trust as a factor in the quality of professional life for teachers became evident during the course of the study. The co-occurrence of environment and social factors in interview questions 5, 8 and 14 and the repeated references to relationships with other teachers and administrators was interpreted to mean that trust existed at the school. Trust was not identified in the literature review as a factor impacting teacher retention or stability, yet trust emerged as a factor for teachers. With statements like, "I can go to anyone," and "our teachers and administration work together," trust was implied in the responses of interview questions and visible during observations. Susan's comment, "I could call on anyone," along with Luanne's observation that, "People are friendly....and even say 'hi' to the substitutes," indicate a high level of trust within the school.

Trust related to motivation-hygiene theory by connecting teachers with conditions that cause them to have satisfaction in the work environment. Teachers at Seneca placed this trust in the principal, as identified in the responses to the greatest support for quality of professional life. They also placed trust in each other as teachers, indicated in the varied responses to the interviews, and also through the observed interactions with one another. One example of the trust in the relationships with the principal involved Bob writing a song about Karen (Appendix D). The song had been sung to her during the faculty meeting in December. Bob sang a rendition for me later that day and shared a copy. The

humor in the song and the well-natured response from Karen demonstrate an environment with relationships based upon trust.

Karen had stated that Seneca was "an easy place to be principal." The factors teachers identified that contributed to the quality of professional life, most notably the social factors, focus on instruction and trust were consistent with her perception of her role principal at Seneca and how she described Seneca as a good place to work. Teacher responses were similar and expressed a view that Seneca is a good place to teach. This characterization was supported by many of the factors identified in the study with high frequency, and by the low teacher turnover rate for the school, especially in the core content grade levels.

### **Teacher Input and Empowerment**

Teachers described a school environment that left them feeling empowered, as having input. Clearly identified as dissatisfiers, teacher input and teacher control over curriculum and instruction failed to surface as high frequency factors in the quality of professional lives of teachers. It is unclear if teachers responded in this manner as an indication that the school environment and culture have caused teachers to give up control or that teachers really don't see empowerment as a key part of their professional experience at Seneca. It could also be that teachers make deliberate trade offs; teacher empowerment was not identified, however, in the descriptions of working in a Title I school with this type of instructional focus.



## **Recommendations**

### **Recommendations for School Administrators**

**Creating a trust environment.** Trust within the context of quality of professional life for teachers should be a cornerstone of creating the dynamics that support student achievement in schools, especially schools with a variety of challenges that impact student achievement. One of the unintended consequences of the accountability movement is the distrust that has emerged for teachers. Many of the historical safety measures for teachers, union contracts, seniority and other provisions are under attack by policy makers at local, state and national levels. Yet, much of the historical distrust that occurs within schools and school districts can be traced to the labor union movement and the belief that unions serve to protect employees from dysfunctional employers. Trust is relationally based, whether founded upon personal and professional relationships, or reliant upon institutional and organizational relationships. When teachers work in an environment that has high levels of trust, they are able to experience a quality of professional life that allows instructional focus and efficacy as evidenced at Seneca Elementary School.

**Understanding the importance of instructional focus.** The overwhelming response of teachers regarding the instructional program and fidelity and its impact on quality of professional life indicates the importance of focus. It is easy for educators and schools to be distracted from the key mission of the school, to educate students and prepare them for the future. On a daily

basis countless opportunities for distraction and interference occur. For high poverty schools, these distractions include the health and safety of students, the impact of outside influences, poverty, language barriers and even the act of getting students to school. In the era of school reform and accountability, many well-intentioned actions by district, state and federal officials create additional opportunities for distraction, especially when programs and mandates may be in conflict with one-another. Teachers are not policy experts and have little connection to where responsibility lies regarding policy issues. They care deeply around being effective on behalf of their students. When teachers feel their ability to maintain instructional focus is impeded, their sense of dissatisfaction in the work environment increases. Dissatisfaction, if not addressed, ultimately erodes confidence in leaders and leads to the onset of distrust, a factor in teacher attrition.

Instructional focus requires the balance between abstract and constructivist views of teaching versus the concreteness of the standards movement and scripted curriculum. At Seneca, it is unclear if the instructional focus is based upon the setting of the school or the adults working in the school, or a combination of both. For one teacher at least, Bob, there was a conscious understanding of the impact for this type of instructional focus. He acknowledged his own struggle with being a constructivist and how that impacted his teaching at Seneca.

## **Recommendations for District Administrators**

### **Identify and support the natural location for communities of practice.**

Most district level administrators were teachers at some point in their careers. A common criticism teachers levy toward administrators points to the length of time an administrator has been out of the classroom. Often this criticism is a cry for empathy on behalf of decision-makers as they shepherd changes in school systems that impact teachers. In this study one clear example involved decisions regarding PLCs as negotiated with the local teachers' association and implemented by the District. Although well intended, the delineation of PLCs, the accountability requirements, and how the contract provisions came into existence, created a reaction from teachers that was the exact opposite of the desired effect. By examining the potential impact on teachers and the quality of professional life, district administrators may be able to provide a better context and strategies for success for schools as the school reform movement continues to grow and evolve. It was unclear at Seneca where the communities of practice truly resided outside of the structured PLCs. It may be an indication that they do exist, but in forms that were not readily apparent during the study. From the study, the only clear evidence I observed for a community of practice occurred with the Seneca PLC and how this particular group of professionals engaged in activities and conversation that focused on how adults worked as professional colleagues and supported student learning. For true collaboration and communities of practice to fully exist, teachers must be able to negotiate the agreements and

disagreements as colleagues regarding deep seated beliefs and instructional practices in a way that demonstrates the complexities and messiness of high functioning relationships on teams. This may mean that the quality of professional life may actually reside within the individual as a reaction to the social environment in a school.

**Exercise restraint in implementation of new initiatives.** The teachers at Seneca shared that some of the success they felt was that change did not happen all at once. They described a methodical approach, as laid out by the principal and executed over time. Teachers have a variety of descriptors they use for the countless change initiatives they have experienced during their careers, from "flavor of the month," to "this too shall pass," all in the name of maintaining a sense of stability in their professional lives. Change is a necessary and vital component within schools, but change without the components to support success and full adoption of change will not occur in a meaningful way when new initiatives are not well-thought and examined for creating longitudinal change versus a temporary attempt at something new.

**Demonstrate an understanding of instructional focus by modeling.** The nature of district administration and leadership creates the opportunity for a loss of instructional focus just by dealing with the day to day emergencies that arise in schools. Further exacerbated by budget cuts and reduction of staff, district administrators need to reexamine time allocation and priorities in order to provide full support and guidance to schools. When teachers and school

administrators see consistency in behaviors and instructional focus demonstrated by district administrators, an environment of trust has a greater chance of occurring within the school system. Instructional focus is not the only factor that impacts trust, but it lends itself to addressing other areas that create distrust.

As educators work together in communities of practice, whether in formal PLCs or other types of structures, the engagement and learning is linked to Rogoff's participatory appropriation (1996) where adults share learning experiences as a mediated activity. From a different perspective, according to Herzberg, this type of activity, process improvement and engagement of employees, falls under the category of job enrichment, essentially professional development through enhancing an employee's job (2003). Herzberg describes job enrichment as a key motivator for employees. As district administrators continue to model instructional focus, paying attention to the core activities to support student achievement and eliminating distractions and barriers, the quality of professional life for teachers may benefit.

### **Recommendations for Policy Makers (School Boards and State Legislatures)**

**Consider the importance of teacher unions.** The current educational environment is blame oriented toward teachers and public education regarding the different ways policy makers believe the public education systems is broken. During the study, the relative absence of references to the local teachers' association (union) with the exception of the dislike of some of the contract requirements of PLCs was intriguing. Teachers perceive NCLB and Race to the

Top as political initiatives and not initiatives to truly improve student achievement. At the national level, a change in the tone of discourse regarding public schools would be an effective first step. Teacher unions should not be vilified but dealt with directly. They own a stake in school reform and must be brought to the table as part of the solution instead of part of the problem. Unions themselves are not barriers to school improvement initiatives, but many of the policies they support bound in employment contracts and collective bargaining agreements are no longer appropriate in the context of the needs of students in the 21st Century. Teacher unions and contracts are representative of cultural changes that must occur. Although only one teacher in the study referenced a negative political tone, as changes in state law regarding the elimination of teacher seniority and initiatives to tie student achievement to teacher evaluation are implemented, it is impossible to discount the impact on teachers as they work within public schools. It is difficult to anticipate how these changes will impact teachers, especially in schools like Seneca.

The normative values of unions or lack thereof at Seneca do not express the normative values of unions throughout other schools in the District. This absence may indicate that some of the more notable characteristics of teacher unions and their culture may manifest themselves in other ways. As an example, unions provide significant opportunity for teacher leadership and teacher input, often expressed in the organizational structure of the union itself. My own background and professional development are grounded in the union culture

where I spent nearly twenty years of my professional life. In states like Wisconsin, Ohio and New York where considerable conflict exists between unions and policy-makers, an opportunity for engagement and collaboration may be lost. In Arizona, this opportunity only exists in school districts that view unions as valuable assets. The Arizona Legislature continues to view teacher unions negatively, as evidenced by repeated efforts to limit the power of the state association and its local affiliates. Too often unions are viewed as an impediment to school reform and improvement. Policy makers have two clear choices when dealing with teacher unions; 1) attack them aggressively, as they are viewed as the barrier to improving schools and responding to current budget deficits; 2) work with them, as they are a key stakeholder in public schools where the majority of teachers are members.

**Examine successful schools.** A second recommendation for state legislatures is to look at successful schools and learn from them. In this study, Seneca provided a great example of a school that has a compelling story to tell. Although I have only examined the components that make up quality of professional life for teachers, a great deal more can be learned by examining leadership styles, communication strategies, the relationship between student achievement and community engagement and countless other aspects that comprise a quality school. As an example, shortly after I concluded my research at Seneca, the school was selected as a Blue Ribbon School nominee by the Arizona Department of Education to be submitted to the United States

Department of Education for consideration.<sup>20</sup> I participated with the principal and the staff to share some of the information gathered in this study as it pertained to their Blue Ribbon application. Such examination of schools with high levels of student achievement may lead to more effective policy decisions for public schools.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study examined the quality of professional life at a Title I elementary school with high levels of student achievement. It is recommended that additional research on the relationship between principal leadership and quality of professional life for teachers be examined. Principal leadership has been identified as important in this study, emerging as one of several factors that influenced quality of professional life for teachers.

A second area for future study is the relationship between unions and their impact on quality of professional life. A variety of relationships between the union and its impact on teachers could be explored. How does a union impact teacher retention? What characteristics exist where the union is viewed positively within a school setting?

A third area for future research involves the examination of quality of professional life for teachers in schools with highly affluent and middle class students. Insight could be gained on how teachers perceive quality of

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<sup>20</sup> Criteria available at [www2.ed.gov/programs/nclbbrs/2010/index.html](http://www2.ed.gov/programs/nclbbrs/2010/index.html)



professional life based upon different factors that may emerge in a study regarding teachers who serve other populations of students.

In addition, research examining the relationship between quality of professional life and student achievement might provide additional insight. Would teachers describe positive or negative factors as they relate to student achievement? To what degree would these factors influence the attitudes of teachers? To what extent does the quality of professional life contribute to student achievement?

### **Summary**

This study examined the quality of professional life at an Excelling Title I elementary school in Arizona. The purpose was to gain insight into how teachers described the factors that impact these perceptions in the workplace. Teachers described satisfiers and dissatisfiers related to their perception of their school. The satisfiers included principal leadership and social factors. The dissatisfiers included lack of teacher input and lack of teacher control over curriculum and instruction. Factors that influenced teacher perceptions of quality of professional life included environment, social factors, professional identity, student characteristics and principal leadership. These factors may contribute to the stability rate for teachers at Seneca. This stability rate is higher than the identified national rates, especially for schools with high levels of poverty. By examining successful schools and the factors that contribute to their success, much can be learned on how to improve education for our students in a global economy.

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APPENDIX A

VOLUNTARY INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS



Voluntary Information for Participants

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Teaching/Grade Level Assignment: \_\_\_\_\_

A perspective that I could add to the study:

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I define the quality of professional life as:

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At Seneca, the greatest support for quality of professional life is:

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At Seneca, the greatest barrier for quality of professional life is:

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APPENDIX B  
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## Interview Questions

### Part 1: Background

Question #1 – Talk about your educational background, how did you come about the decision of becoming an educator? (What factors influenced your decision to become an educator?)

Question #2 – What involvement did you have within the community growing up? In college? (Church, volunteer work, etc.)

Question #3 – As you began your teaching career, what values did you hold that framed your teaching?

Question #4 - How did these values impact your arrival at Seneca to teach with this population of students?

### Part 2: Current Experience

Question #5 – How would you describe the current learning environment here at Seneca?

Question #6 – What does a "typical" day look like at Seneca?

Question #7 – What factors influence the level of student achievement?

Question #8 – How would you describe the professional relationships among teachers?

Question #9 – What does a professional learning community mean to you?

Question #10 – Which teacher(s) do you work most closely with? Why?

### Part 3: Reflections

Question #11 – Based upon your experiences, what does it mean to you for Seneca to continue as an Excelling label, in light of the challenges the school has faced?

Question #12 – How have you changed or modified your educational practices at Seneca as a result of your experience at the school?

Question #13 – If you were to share your experiences with teachers in other schools, district administrators, or the School Board about your experience at Seneca, what would you tell them?

Question #14 – Do you plan to stay at Seneca? Why or why not?

Question #15 - Does being at an excelling Title I school influence your professional identity? Why or why not?

Question #16 – Do you have any other thoughts you would like to share, especially in the context of being an Excelling School?

APPENDIX C

SONG: KAREN THE FAMOUS PRINCIPAL

Karen the Famous Principal

(featuring the "Brown Nosed Teachers")  
(Sung to the tune of Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer)

You know teaching is easy  
Try administration  
Craig Vaughn was brilliant  
Some say amazing  
But do you recall  
The most famous principal of all

We are the brown nosed teachers  
Here to sing a song about Karen  
We may not be at school on Monday  
As we sing along you can tell

Look at for Mrs. Bluebell  
And her very shiny shoes  
And if you really like them  
Pick 'em up at Nordstroms too

All of the other teachers  
Used to laugh and call her names  
Then Karen became a boxer  
And things just haven't been the same

Then one foggy Christmas Eve  
Jeff Thomas came to say  
Karen why's your school so great?  
Perhaps I'll have to investigate

Not sure what he discovered  
But we think it's easy to see  
Karen the famous principal  
You'll go down in history

Please oh please don't fire me

APPENDIX D  
IRB EXEMPTION



Office of Research Integrity and Assurance

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**To:** Arnold Danzig  
College of

**From:** Mark Roosa, Chair *SM*  
Soc Beh IRB

**Date:** 11/22/2010

**Committee Action:** Exemption Granted

**IRB Action Date:** 11/22/2010

**IRB Protocol #:** 1011005704

**Study Title:** Quality of Professional Life for Teachers

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(2).

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.