

Teacher Collaboration in Context: Professional Learning Communities
in an Era of Standardization and Accountability

by

Karen Benson

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Approved June 2011 by the
Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Thomas Barone, Chair
David Berliner
Billie Enz

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

August 2011

ABSTRACT

Proponents of current educational reform initiatives emphasize strict accountability, the standardization of curriculum and pedagogy and the use of standardized tests to measure student learning and indicate teacher, administrator and school performance. As a result, professional learning communities have emerged as a platform for teachers to collaborate with one another in order to improve their teaching practices, increase student achievement and promote continuous school improvement. The primary purpose of this inquiry was to investigate how teachers respond to working in professional learning communities in which the discourses privilege the practice of regularly comparing evidence of students' learning and results. A second purpose was to raise questions about how the current focus on standardization, assessment and accountability impacts teachers, their interactions and relationships with one another, their teaching practices, and school culture.

Participants in this qualitative, ethnographic inquiry included fifteen teachers working within Green School District (a pseudonym). Initial interviews were conducted with all teachers, and responses were categorized in a typology borrowed from Barone (2008). Data analysis involved attending to the behaviors and experiences of these teachers, and the meanings these teachers associated with those behaviors and events.

Teachers of GSD responded differently to the various layers of expectations and pressures inherent in the policies and practices in education

today. The experiences of the teachers from GSD confirm the body of research that illuminates the challenges and complexity of working in collaborative forms of professional development, situated within the present era of accountability. Looking through lenses privileged by critical theorists, this study examined important intended and unintended consequences inherent in the educational practices of standardization and accountability. The inquiry revealed that a focus on certain “results” and the demand to achieve short terms gains may impede the creation of successful, collaborative, professional learning communities.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my boys, Clay and Cole, who have demonstrated remarkable patience and provided ongoing encouragement throughout my journey to earn this degree. I wrote this dedication page during the week of Clay's graduation from college and as Cole prepares to wrap up eighth grade and embark on his high school experience. These events mark significant milestones in *their* lives.

May you both continue to value the importance of what it means to be educated and committed to lifelong learning -- posing questions and growing intellectually and spiritually as you pursue goals and aspirations about which *you* are most passionate. And always remember that what we accomplish and what happens to us are not nearly as significant as what we *become* by those experiences.

Dream big, live fully, make good choices, be kind to yourselves and others, and never underestimate your abilities to contribute positively to the world. Embrace the journey, boys. I will always be rooting for you both, along the way.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many persons warrant acknowledgement and recognition as I approach this “culminating experience” in the Curriculum and Instruction, Ph.D. program at ASU.

First, I want to extend deep gratitude to my parents for their unwavering love, support and longstanding confidence in me. This foundation gave me the courage to embark upon this experience in the first place. Though it has been eleven years since his death, I continue to be heavily influenced by the strength and sensibility demonstrated by my father and the many lessons learned from him. I am very fortunate to continue to experience my mother’s selfless and unrivaled capacity to understand, love and support others. Mom always knows just what to say during the moments I feel overwhelmed as a full-time working mother and doctoral student. She models what it means to be a “teacher” in every sense of the word.

I have been fortunate to have been influenced by three very special teachers who shaped my career. My mother and both grandmothers were teachers before starting families. I treasure the teaching press kit my Grandma Mae gave me years ago, as it prompted my first attempts at “playing school.” And I am grateful beyond words for the encouragement and unconditional love of my Grandmother Elisabeth.

I am very thankful for the ongoing support of my husband, Jeff, and my sons, Clay and Cole, over the course of this eight year journey. I often brought my

studies in the form of journals, papers, highlighters or stacks of books to the boys' sporting events, school activities and on vacations. I am grateful for their patience and understanding -- and for the times they allowed me to hide in coffee shops to read or write while in pursuit of this degree.

Many special colleagues, friends, and other family members have provided ongoing support and motivation during this time. I continue to be grateful for their kind comments, warm gestures and for the levity they provided during what some have referred to as my "freak out" moments brought on by convergent deadlines or other significant stressors. Other colleagues deserving special thanks include the teachers across GSD that agreed to participate in this inquiry. They kindly gave their time and energy to share their experiences so that we might learn from them.

Finally, I would like to extend sincere appreciation to my Dissertation Chair, Dr. Thomas Barone, for his invaluable insight and patience. Many thanks are owed to my entire committee, Dr. Barone, Dr. Billie Enz and Dr. David Berliner, for their commitment to education, the principles by which they live and learn, and for the example they provide for the graduate students they have supported during their longstanding careers at ASU.

Thank you all for supporting and guiding me through this milestone experience.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	xi
CHAPTER	
1 OVERVIEW OF THE INQUIRY	1
Purpose of the Study	3
Focus and Outline of Topic.....	5
Professional Learning Communities: An Introduction	8
Definitions.....	13
Implications of Federal and State Legislation	16
Why Critical Theory?	19
Content of Chapters	21
2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE	23
Historical Overview of Professional Development	26
Reform Initiatives Involving Collegiality and Collaboration	28
Professional Learning Communities.....	46
Learning Communities: Lessons from the Past	50
Celebrations and Challenges: Early Research	55
Review of NSDC Report	66
Situating PLCs Within the Accountability Era.....	68
Summary.....	69

CHAPTER	Page
3 METHODS AND METHODOLOGY	72
Justification of Methods.....	73
Description of District.....	75
Participants and Data Collection.....	77
Data Analysis and Typology.....	79
From Validity and Generalization to Critical Utility	81
Situating the Researcher	83
Logistics	84
Summary	88
4 TEACHERS' RESPONSES TO EXTERNAL MANDATES	
REGARDING STANDARDIZATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY:	
A TYPOLOGY	89
Complying	91
Embracing.....	93
Coping.....	97
Coping with Expectations from those Imposing	
Mandates	98
Coping with Competition and Comparison of Students'	
Scores	99
Coping with the Standardization of the Instruction and	
Work of Teachers.....	108

CHAPTER	Page
Coping with the Standardization of Students.....	115
Coping with the Standardization of Curriculum and Assessments	117
Coping with Outside Variables that Impact Student Performance	122
Subverting.....	123
Negotiating.....	134
Collective Resistance	142
Escaping.....	144
Summary.....	144
5 EXAMINING LARGER IMPLICATIONS	146
Accountability as Defined by Teachers	147
Theoretical Frame	152
What is the Purpose of Education?	153
What Counts as Knowledge?	155
How Should Knowledge be Assessed?.....	158
What do Systematic Responses to Student Learning Look Like?	160
Teacher Empowerment or Disenfranchisement in the..... Era of Accountability	161

CHAPTER	Page
The Hidden Curriculum	165
Evidence of Reproduction.....	167
Evidence of Resistance	170
Summary	173
6 SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND FINAL THOUGHTS.....	175
Were PLCs in Green School District “Successful”?.....	176
What do the Responses of Teachers from GSD Reveal?.....	178
Complexity of School Culture	179
Collegiality: Reciprocal or Contrived.....	180
The Not-So-Hidden Costs of Sharing One’s Expertise ...	181
SB 1040.....	183
Unintended Consequences Perpetuated by PLCs	185
PLCs as Transformative.....	188
Re-conceptualizing the Work of Teachers.....	191
Recommendations for Future Research	192
Implications of National Common Core Standards	193
Implications of Teachers’ Identity	194
Factors that Promote Competitive or Cooperative Cultures	195
Teachers’ Relationships with Students	195

CHAPTER	Page
“Systematic” Interventions and Opportunities for Enrichment.....	196
Other Benefits of Participation in PLCs	197
Final Thoughts	197
REFERENCES	201
APPENDIX	
A Introduction Letter to Participants	214

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Typology Employed to Categorize Responses	90

CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF THE INQUIRY

Over the last three decades, concerns about the performance of schools and the competency of teachers have increased. These concerns have been the catalyst for a variety of educational policies and reform initiatives that emphasize strict accountability, the standardization and external control of pedagogy and curriculum, and a reliance on standardized testing (McNeil, 2000; Goodman, 1992; Apple, 2004; Brady, 2008). Given the public and political perception that good schooling can be measured by good results on standardized tests, various forms of standardized tests and assessments are routinely used as a means to measure student learning and as indicators of teacher, administrator and school performance. In response to pressures for teachers and schools to do better and produce measureable results, professional learning communities have emerged as a means for teachers to collaborate with one another in order to improve their teaching practices, increase student achievement and promote continuous school improvement. Support for professional learning communities has grown as several national studies have suggested that opportunities for regular, school-wide, collaborative learning are critical in building the capacity of teachers to improve their instructional practices, increase student achievement, and ensure school success (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009).

The backdrop and context in which professional learning communities are currently situated is significant. As a result of growing frustration with the No

Child Left Behind Act (2001) and escalating concerns about the nation's competitiveness in the global economy, movements to establish and assess national curricular standards have found new traction, and the value placed on students' standardized test scores has given new meaning to "high-stakes" testing. A student's performance on a single test can determine into what class, "ability group," or highly stratified academic track a child will be placed, or whether or not a student is allowed to graduate. Cumulatively, test scores can determine the amount of funding schools receive from state or federal agencies, labels that shape the public's perceptions of schools, and penalties, bonuses, dismissal or promotion for teachers and administrators. Though the use of students' test scores as a means to evaluate teacher and school performance and regulate an entire system may be questionable, the practice is commonplace today.

Some research identifies forms of collaborative professional learning as the most effective types of professional development for educators (Hirsch, 2009). But little research has been conducted to inform our understanding of how the practices inherent in the era of standardization and accountability may be influencing the day-to-day lived experiences of the teachers within our public schools today – especially as they participate in job-embedded professional development in collaborative environments, including professional learning communities (PLCs).

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this inquiry was to investigate how teachers respond to working in PLCs in which the discourses privilege regular comparison of students' learning and "results" on various assessments. A second purpose was to raise questions about how the current focus on standardization, assessment and accountability impacts teachers, their interactions and relationships with one another, their teaching practices, and school culture. In this research study I reveal some of the varied experiences of teachers working within professional learning communities to explore how educational practices in the era of accountability are lived out in schools, and to investigate the contexts in which teachers' collaborative experiences are embedded.

I first became interested in these topics when working as a middle level teacher from 1989 to 2003. As the pressures of accountability increased I was both perplexed and fascinated with the value placed on my students' performance on standardized tests, and I began to note the impact that the knowledge of others' test scores was having on my colleagues, on our collaborative interactions and relationships with one another, on my students, and on the culture of our school.

My interest in this phenomenon continued as I worked for ASU as a supervisor of the student teaching experiences of pre-service teachers in the spring of 2005. While making a routine visit to one my pre-service teachers, the cooperating teacher shared with me that he had recently requested to be reassigned to a different school. Citing pressure from colleagues as a result of the

public reporting of his students' lower test scores, this cooperating teacher explained that he no longer felt comfortable or respected at this school. He shared that his students' test scores included most of the students with special needs at his grade level and that this context, and the many variables that might impact students' scores, were not a part of the discourse at his school. The cooperating teacher cited this lack of context as to what the scores might represent and imply at his grade level as one of the main factors for his request to be reassigned.

More recently, as a professional development support specialist for five years in a large school district in Arizona, I have listened to teachers share their experiences about working collaboratively with their colleagues in professional learning communities within the current era of accountability. Some of these accounts give credence to researchers today who speak of the transformative potential of PLCs to positively impact student achievement, provide great insight to teachers regarding their own teaching practices, and have a profound impact on teachers' sense of efficacy and satisfaction with their profession. But other accounts include concerns of teachers about their participation in collaborative interactions with their colleagues, especially when students' results (including benchmark or AIMS scores) have been shared publicly with one another and used as a means to indicate quality teaching. Such accounts include: tension amongst teachers after their students' test scores (AIMS) were shared on overhead transparencies in front of the entire faculty – with teachers' names included, a teacher entrusted all day with those identified as the lowest students of a grade

level (established by previous year's test scores) regularly vomiting at work when required to collaborate and routinely share evidence of student learning with her colleagues, a teacher requesting that a colleague not be allowed to mentor other teachers based on the publication of said colleague's students' test scores, teachers refusing to share self-created materials with colleagues from other teams or campuses in an attempt to maintain the highest scores in their grade level or content area, and teachers sharing their concerns about the competitive culture they believe to be escalating within their schools as they are required to regularly share and compare evidence of student learning, in various forms.

As calls for the restructuring of schools to facilitate more collaborative interactions continue, these varied accounts continue to raise important questions about how teachers may be responding to and coping with the pressures inherent in educational reform initiatives today. Thus, this research is important as persons try to understand how the practices inherent in "standardization" and "accountability" are lived out in schools, and the institutional policies, goals and constraints in which teachers' collaborative experiences are currently embedded.

Focus and Outline of Topic

Roland Barth (2006) suggested that the nature of relationships among the adults within a school has a greater influence on the character of that school and on student accomplishment than anything else. It is, Barth believed, the relationships among the educators in a school that define and shape a school's culture. If the relationships between administrators and teachers are trusting and

cooperative, then the school will show evidence of teachers working collaboratively to create a culture of collegiality. Barth defined this culture of collegiality and congeniality as one that fosters growth on the part of teachers as teachers talk about their instructional practices and share their craft with one another. However, Barth noted that when the culture of schools reflects competition, fear, and suspicion, these qualities pervade the entire school. He found that in competitive cultures, teachers began to guard their tricks and conceal what they do from other colleagues.

If we accept Barth's claim that it is the nature of relationships among the adults in schools that have the greatest potential to shape the culture of the school and impact student learning, we would be wise to try to better understand the lived experiences of teachers working collaboratively within the context of the era of accountability today. Thus, through this study I have investigated how the teachers in one school district, working within one model of a professional learning community, are responding to the current focus on standardization, testing, and the practice of regularly comparing evidence of students' results.

My research purposes are, indeed, heuristic, intended to raise questions about how teachers respond to working in PLCs in which the discourses privilege regular comparison of students' learning and results, and how the educational practices in the era of standardization and accountability are lived out in schools. To support the analysis required in this inquiry, I used a typology to identify styles of teachers' responses to the demands of working collaboratively in PLCs,

as is explained in Chapters Three and Four. Employing this typology allowed me to make sense of the data and begin the process of theorizing as important ideas and themes within the categories began to emerge among the responses of the participants.

The context in which teachers' collaborative experiences are embedded, and the meaning that teachers make of such experiences, may be better understood when considering fundamental questions long considered important by cultural and critical theorists in education. Such questions include: What is the purpose of schools? What should be taught in schools? What actually counts as evidence of students' learning in the present era of high-stakes testing and accountability? What really happens in schools when curriculum and testing are "standardized," when teachers regularly compare "results" of student learning, and when schools respond to students' learning "systematically?" and, Whose interests might be served by the policies, practices, and external mandates in education today? Such questions are considered in Chapter Five of this dissertation. As a result, it is my hope that this research may function to stimulate discussion about these questions and allow teachers the space and opportunity to reflect about their participation in PLCs, on the practices inherent in standardization and accountability, and on the policies and processes at work in schools that may serve to empower or disenfranchise them.

Professional Learning Communities: An Introduction

Historically, the collaborative engagements of teachers have taken on various forms in the United States. But in response to the current high-stakes testing and accountability movement, new kinds of collaborative inquiry among teachers have emerged. Rooted in social theories of learning, these varied reform initiatives have taken the shape of *communities of practice*, *collaborative study groups*, *critical friend groups* and *professional learning communities (PLCs)*. The latter type is now being used to describe a variety of collaborative professional development occurrences intended to improve teaching and learning.

According to the National Staff Development Council, learning communities are “ongoing teams that meet on a regular basis, preferably several times a week, for the purposes of learning, joint lesson planning, and problem solving” (NSDC, 2011). The fundamental building block of learning communities is the development of a sustainable culture of collaboration in which participating teachers regularly discuss teaching practices in order to improve student learning.

Credit for the emergence of the professional learning communities concept is often attributed to Little (1982; 1990a), Rosenholtz (1989), and Senge (1990). While researchers have since posed various models of PLCs (Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1995; Hord, 1997; Schmoker, 2006; Killion, 2006), the one first established by Rick Dufour and Robert Eaker (1998) seems preeminent in the United States today, and it is the model endorsed by the District in which this study was

conducted. (Note: In the years since, other researchers have added ideas and are now affiliated with the Dufour and Eaker model. Thus, I refer to this model as the Dufour et al. model throughout the remainder of the inquiry.) Though there have been minor revisions made to this model over the last decade, the focus on student learning and results has remained unchanged, as is indicated in the following:

The very essence of a learning community is a focus on and a commitment to the learning of each student. When a school or district functions as a PLC, educators within the organization embrace high levels of learning for all students as both the reason the organization exists and the fundamental responsibility of those who work within it. In order to achieve this purpose, the members of a PLC create and are guided by a clear and compelling vision of what the organization must become in order to help all students learn... Members work together to clarify exactly what each student must learn, monitor each student's learning on a timely basis, provide systematic interventions that ensure students receive additional time and support for learning when they struggle, and extend and enrich learning when students have already mastered the intended outcomes. (AllthingsPLC.org, 2011)

In subsequent years, Dufour et al. have established three core ideas to guide the work of educators working within their model of PLC:

1. The fundamental purpose of the school is to ensure high levels of learning for all students, and the extent to which the school is successful in achieving that purpose will have a profound effect on the short-term and long-term success of students. The relevant question in a PLC is not, "Was it taught?" but rather, "Was it learned?" The shift from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning underpins the work of a PLC.
2. Educators cannot fulfill the fundamental purpose of learning for all if they work in isolation. Therefore, they must work together collaboratively to address those issues that have the greatest impact on student learning and must take collective responsibility to ensure the learning takes place.
3. Educators will not know the extent to which students are learning unless they have a results orientation, constantly seeking evidence and

indicators of student learning. They will use that evidence to identify students who need additional time and support for learning and to inform and improve their own practice in the classroom. (AllthingsPLC.org, 2011)

At the heart of this model is a kind of collaboration defined as a “systematic process in which teachers work together, interdependently, to analyze and impact professional practice in order to improve individual and collective results” (Dufour et al., 2006). Dufour et al. emphasize that collaboration does not lead to improved results unless participants focus on the “right issues.” Thus, they establish clear boundaries for what might be considered permissible discourse during PLCs – distinguishing between collaboration and “co-laboration” (Dufour et al., 2006). Teachers participating in the Dufour et al. model of PLCs use the following questions to guide their collaborative work:

1. What knowledge, skills, and dispositions must each student acquire as a result of this course, grade level, and/or unit of instruction?
2. What evidence will we gather to monitor student learning on a timely basis?
3. How will we provide students with additional time and support in a timely, directive, and systematic way when they experience difficulty in their learning?
4. How will we enrich the learning of students who are already proficient?
5. How can we use our SMART goals and evidence of student learning to inform and improve our practice? (AllthingsPLC.org, 2011)

The popularity of the Dufour et al. PLC model is impressive. According to the Dufours (2009), the model is practiced in all 50 states and provinces and in educational systems around the world today. Numerous books and articles have

been published that explain important tenets of this model of a professional learning community and that depict the complexity of establishing a culture of collaboration within schools. Though the breadth and depth of this model cannot be captured here, key attributes merit clarification and attention, as they are important to this inquiry. First, this model recommends that teachers be *required* to participate in PLCs as part of their professional development responsibilities. Second, the Dufour et al. model requires that teachers work together to build shared knowledge of their curriculum, and then determine, by consensus, *the 8-10 most essential student outcomes -- the skills, knowledge, and dispositions -- per semester*, for their course or grade level. Third, in this model teachers are asked to agree on criteria to measure student learning of such outcomes, and apply those criteria consistently. In this way, teachers are “empowered” to create the kinds of *common assessments* that they believe would best measure student learning and inform teachers’ practice. These common assessments can come in a variety of forms (i.e. performance based activities, essays, multiple choice tests) but generally, they involve *teachers assessing kids in common ways*, honoring every accommodation within students’ IEPs (Dufour & Dufour, 2009). Teachers then regularly meet to *assess the effectiveness of their instruction based on the results of students’ learning*. Fourth, key to the Dufour et al. model is that teachers assess and then share and *compare evidence of student learning*, in a variety of forms (common assessments, district benchmarks, etc.) to identify teachers, teams, and schools, “getting amazing results” (Dufour & Dufour, 2009). Fifth, schools are

expected to respond to results of students' learning *systemically*, providing *systematic interventions* to ensure that students receive additional time and support for learning when they struggle, and extending and enriching learning when students have already mastered the intended outcomes.

At the core of the Dufour et al. PLC model is an acceptance that the key purpose of schools is to ensure that all students learn the intended curriculum.

There is little question that this model is rooted in the ideas of essentialism, as is evidenced by the following:

In the four [successful] schools we studied there was no ambiguity and no hedging regarding each school's fundamental purpose. Staff members embraced the premise that the very reason their school existed was to help all of their students – the flawed, imperfect, boys and girls who come to them each day – acquire essential knowledge and skills given the current resources available to them. Period! (Dufour, 2004b)

Whereas many schools operate as if their primary purpose is to ensure that children are taught, PLCs are dedicated to the idea that their organization exists to ensure that all students learn essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions. All the other characteristics of a PLC flow directly from this epic shift in assumptions about the purpose of the school. (AllthingsPLC.org, 2011)

Reports of the successes of this model of PLC are abundant. Indicators of this success include gains in student achievement as measured by test scores, reduced dropout rates, and accounts from teachers about the insight they have acquired with respect to their own teaching practices as a result of their participation in this form of professional development (Dufour and Dufour, 2009). Couched in the language of improving educational quality and assuring that all students learn, the rhetoric attached to this model of a professional learning

community is impressive. However, in this inquiry I have tried to look beyond the rhetoric to learn what is happening as teachers from Green School District work together within the context of the accountability era. I sought to discover whether the goals and practices of PLCs can avoid the negative effects of standardization, accountability, and teacher disempowerment previously identified in educational research (McNeil, 2000; Apple, 2003, 2004; Goodman, 1988, 1992).

Definitions

The terms *collaboration* and *collegiality* are often used interchangeably (Little, 1982; Hargreaves, 1992), and definitions of the terms vary according to researchers. Thus, to avoid confusion about these terms and clarify others within this research, the following definitions will be accepted for the purposes of this research and throughout this inquiry:

AIMS – Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) is a state mandated, criterion referenced test designed to measure each student's progress in learning the Arizona Academic Standards. During the 09-10 school year, all Arizona students took AIMS at grades 3, 5 and 8, and in high school. Beginning with the class of 2006, high school students must "Meet" the content standards in Reading, Mathematics and Writing in order to receive a diploma.

AYP -- Under the NCLB Act (2002), each state is required to establish a definition of "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) to use each year to determine the achievement of each school district and school. AYP is intended to highlight

where schools need improvement and should focus their resources. The statute gives states and local educational agencies significant flexibility in how they direct resources and tailor interventions to the needs of individual schools identified for improvement (US Department of Education, 2011).

Collaboration – systematic process in which people work together, interdependently, to analyze and impact professional practice in order to improve individual or collective results (Dufour, 2004b).

Collegiality – a derivation of ‘colleague’ to describe teachers’ involvement with their peers on any level, be it intellectual, social and/or emotional -- defined this way, it embraces communal associations in the workplace in a much broader sense than collaboration permits (Jarzabkowski, 1999).

Common assessments – assessments typically created collaboratively and used formatively by a team of teachers responsible for the same grade level or course (Dufour et al., 2006).

Contrived collegiality or collaboration – interactions that are seen as administratively regulated, where attendance is compulsory, and the focus is on an implementation of mandates proposed by outsiders rather than on teacher development (Hargreaves, 1991).

Cultural capital – the high cultural knowledge that ultimately results in the owner's financial and social advantage (Bourdieu, 2003).

Formative assessment – assessment *for* learning used by teachers and students to advance, and not merely monitor, each student’s learning (Stiggins, 2002).

Hidden curriculum – the unintended lessons, knowledge, and ideas learned in schools as a result of the practices, procedures, curricula, rules, rituals, relationships, structures and experiences lived within schools.

High-stakes testing – Any test with the potential to be used in ways to determine serious, life-altering decisions that affect teachers, students, or administrators including: who is promoted and who is retained, who will receive a high school degree and who will not, whether a school will be reconstituted, or whether there will be job losses or cash bonuses for teachers and administrators (Nichols and Berliner, 2007).

Shared knowledge, skills, and dispositions – the intended curriculum collaboratively determined by educators working within the Dufour et al. model of PLCs.

SMART goals – goals that are strategic and specific, measurable, attainable, results-oriented, and time bound (O’Neill and Conzemius, 2006).

Standards – any measures identified as important knowledge to teach – either in the form of broad goals intended to guide the work of students and teachers or as a set of narrow and reductive objectives (McNeil, 2000).

Standardization – all forms of controls over testing and curriculum intended to ensure “same” and “equitable” learning opportunities for all, and used to monitor children’s learning and teachers’ behavior (McNeil, 2000).

Summative assessment – assessments *of* learning, usually occurring at the end of instruction (Stiggins, 2002).

Systematic interventions – school-wide plans that ensure that every student in every course or grade level will receive additional time and support for learning as soon as they experience difficulty in acquiring essential knowledge and skills... systematic interventions occur during the school day and students are required, not invited, to devote the extra time and secure the extra support for learning (Dufour et al., 2006).

Systemic process – specific effort to organize the combination of related parts into a coherent whole in a methodical, deliberate, and orderly way toward a particular aim (Dufour et al., 2006).

Implications of Federal and State Legislation

During the 2009-10 school year (and during the data collection period of this inquiry) the state of Arizona applied for a share of the 4.3 billion dollars available within the federal Race to the Top grants, and Green School District signed on to be a participating school district from the state of Arizona. The proposal submitted by the state of Arizona included the “vision” that by 2020, Arizona’s students would be ranked among the best in the United States, setting an example and achieving excellence amid challenging circumstances. To

accomplish this vision, Arizona put together a plan that incorporated grade level and content academic interventions, creating an end to social promotion while at the same time fostering a “move on when ready” environment for all students.

Most relevant with respect to this dissertation, the proposal defined student growth based on academic achievement, and it tied student growth and performance to teacher evaluation. Specifically, the application submitted by Arizona sought to: 1.) Strengthen the accountability of performance-based compensation plans based on student achievement, 2.) Ensure that student growth data is one of the main indicators of teacher and principal evaluation criteria, 3.) Develop teacher and principal evaluations with at least four ratings that incorporate student growth, 4.) Use new evaluations to inform performance-based compensation and to determine whether to promote, retain, award tenure, or remove teachers and principals, and 5.) Promote equitable distribution of highly effective teachers and principals (US Department of Education, 2011).

RTTT grant applications were submitted in January, 2010, and awards were announced in April and again in September, 2010. Arizona was not awarded a RTTT grant, but highlights of the proposal fueled the movement towards standardization, high-stakes testing and accountability during the data collection of this inquiry. In keeping with the expectations of the RTTT initiative, the Arizona State Legislature passed SB 1040 in the spring of 2010. This law requires that all school districts adopt and maintain a model framework for

teacher and principal evaluation instruments that includes quantitative data on student academic progress to indicate highly effective teachers and principals.

Regardless of whether or not the state of Arizona was awarded the RTTT grant, the state is moving forward with much of the content within it. With the passing of SB 1040, Arizona is moving towards using student growth data as the primary means to indicate quality teaching, and as a means to evaluate teachers and principals. Thus, the implications of the RTTT competition and SB 1040 legislation are significant, as the pressures of teaching in the era of accountability began to take on a whole new meaning during the data collection of this inquiry.

Further state action included that, in response to a multi-billion dollar budget deficit, Arizona state legislators proposed over 750 million dollars in cuts to K-12 education over the course of this dissertation. As a result, the District in which I pursued this inquiry was forced to conduct a reduction in force of approximately 150 teachers at the end of 08-09 year, and almost all first and second year teachers across the District were notified that they were RIFed at that time. Most of these teachers were called back in August, 2009, but many accepted positions at different schools within the District.

The repercussions of teachers changing schools as a result of the RIF and recall are significant, as all teachers were expected to immediately begin working within PLCs with new grade level or content area colleagues across the District in the fall of 2009. The context of the budget crisis in the state, and the looming stress of another RIF expected in the spring of 2010 is noteworthy throughout the

inquiry. The stress, tension, and uncertainty experienced in these challenging economic times impacted all persons, their relationships with one another, and the culture of their schools throughout the duration of this inquiry.

Why Critical Theory?

Theories are abstract sets of assumptions and assertions that persons employ in order to interpret or explain psychological, social, cultural, and historical phenomena or processes (Dimitriadis and Kamberelis, 2006). Both the purpose of an inquiry and a researcher's affiliation with a particular paradigm influence the selection of a theoretical frame, as theories are employed with different functions in mind. Thus, the choice of which frame might be most relevant and appropriate to apply to a research phenomenon is important as it influences how persons might come to understand a phenomenon, and in some cases, informs the way that the research may be taken up and extended in other inquiries.

There are many lenses within the field of critical pedagogy or within what researchers recognize as cultural studies or critical theory that persons could apply to shed light on this study. Like a kaleidoscope, each lens employed varies the turn ever so slightly, allowing different images or questions to come into view. I employed the work of critical theorists in order to better understand, organize, and examine what is happening within a broader framework as teachers work collaboratively within the context of the current era of accountability.

Understanding critical theory and how it has been used to examine, explain, or inform policies or practices within the domain of education is complex. Critical theory shares space with the field of cultural studies within educational discourses, and both offer new ways of understanding the sociology of education. Critical theory is most distinguishable by the attention given to understanding the notion of power, though critical theorists differ significantly in how they believe power structures are produced, reproduced, transmitted, resisted, or transformed. Critical theorists maintain an interest in social justice, emancipation, and equity in education, and they are united and committed to imagining a more democratic society. Generally, persons employ critical theory to examine the broader forces in society, including schools and other institutions, to consider how these forces may be creating and perpetuating ideologies, and the beliefs and ideas that persons come to perceive as their reality. Most critical theorists today acknowledge that social practices and institutions often serve the interests of the dominant socio-economic class, and they work to reveal the ideological constraints at work within societies and institutions that serve to empower or disenfranchise persons within them.

Though critical theory has been criticized for its undue emphasis on class and economic structure and its lack of attention to factors such as race, gender, sexual orientation or disability, privileging the work of critical theorists as a theoretical frame for this inquiry offers a place to start to examine how both public and political perceptions continue to shape the experiences of teachers and

impact school culture. Further, it serves as a catalyst to begin to unveil the hidden curriculum that may be conveyed in the practices and external policies mandated in education, and the unintended consequences that ensue as a result of such practices and policies. Employing critical theory allows researchers to better understand how teachers are responding to and making sense of the current context, and challenge how the practices inherent in the era of standardization and accountability are lived out in schools.

Content of Chapters

This chapter provided an introduction to the inquiry. Key terms and acronyms that are used throughout the inquiry were defined, and tenets of the Dufour et al., model of professional learning communities were presented. The chapter introduced important federal and state legislation that occurred throughout the duration of the inquiry, and a brief justification of the theoretical framework employed throughout the inquiry was included at the end of this chapter. Chapter Two of this dissertation includes a robust review of the literature regarding collaborative forms of professional development. Chapter Three describes the methods and methodology of the inquiry. Chapter Four presents the responses of teachers in GSD as they work collaboratively within the era of accountability, organized by a typology. Chapter Five examines the larger implications of this study, raising questions about the current focus on standardization, accountability and the knowledge forms and assessment strategies privileged in current educational reform initiatives. Finally, Chapter Six includes a discussion about

what persons might learn from this inquiry, recommendations for further research, and final thoughts and questions raised within the inquiry are considered.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The construct of “accountability” is central to discussions about perceived problems in both the public and private sectors of the world today. In the age of accountability, no one area has received more critical attention than public education. Fueled by the No Child Left Behind Act, the Race to the Top grant competition and an unyielding national reform agenda requiring states to impose accountability systems designed to hold schools, principals and teachers responsible for student progress, few would dispute that educators are under enormous pressure today. Under the current era of accountability, students’ test scores are now routinely used to indicate the performance of schools and as a means to indicate quality teaching, and teachers and principals face penalties, incentives, bonuses, or dismissal based on student performance. Pressures to perform are at an all time high as schools face the loss of federal funding or state takeover if students fail to demonstrate growth and proficiency as measured by annual, federally mandated testing.

But the concerns raised about the performance of public schools are not new. Since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, public education has been under heavy scrutiny. Though critics have challenged that such attacks may be part of a wider strategy to privatize education and strengthen corporate domination of American society (Apple, 2004; Berliner and Biddle, 1995; Giroux, 2009), numerous reports portraying public education as disastrous and as a failure

have had an impact on public and political perceptions about schools. As a result, public discourse and educational policy have turned to focus on that which can be quantified and measured by high stakes tests and statistically based measurements. In response, a variety of educational reform initiatives have been proposed to reorganize schools, raise academic standards, promote gains in student achievement, and improve teaching. A growing body of literature calls for schools to design collaborative models of professional development to address the complexities of teaching and learning and the challenges in school reform initiatives within a climate of high-stakes testing and accountability.

Though the literature is awash with accounts of how to promote collaborative forms of professional development, little research has been conducted to inform our understanding of how the practices and pressures inherent in standardization and accountability may be influencing the lived experiences of teachers working collaboratively within public schools today. Appreciating how teachers are responding to the practice of regularly comparing and sharing evidence of students' learning requires an understanding about how teachers are being asked to work collaboratively with their colleagues, an awareness of what previous research has revealed about collaborative forms of professional development, and a recognition of the policies and practices inherent in the present era of accountability in which teachers' collaborative experiences are embedded. Thus, in keeping with the purposes of this dissertation and inquiry, this review of the literature will include:

1. A brief account of the historical perspective of professional development for teachers in order to understand how the concept of “collaboration” has developed, and the justification for the surge in collaborative forms of professional development -- deemed the most likely to impact teachers’ practices and improve student learning.
2. A review of reform initiatives involving collegiality and collaboration to support our understanding of how teachers have previously been asked to work together in the workplace, and inform our understanding of what has happened when they have engaged in such activities – especially as this supports our understanding of the risks and vulnerability teachers have cited, and what impact their collaborative exchanges have had on school culture.
3. A review of a much earlier time in education in which teacher efficacy was promoted and authority decentralized, during the progressive education movement -- when communication and collaboration formed and flourished and many forms of data were used to shed light on student development, inform decision-making, and shape educational procedures and policies.
4. An overview of the varied models and tenets of PLCs in order to unpack and understand the ways in which teachers are being asked to work together.

5. A report of what early research has indicated about PLCs in order to understand what researchers have indicated are the benefits and value to them, and what others have revealed are the complexities and conflicts inherent within PLCs and the policies and practices of schools.
6. A brief summary of the findings of the NSDC Report (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2009) to compare the opportunities for job embedded collaborative learning of teachers in the United States with those from other nations.

Understanding the experiences of teachers working in collaborative forms of professional development cannot be fully understood without appreciating the context in which they are embedded. Thus, the latter part of this literature review includes a brief examination of the complexities and tensions inherent in the accountability measures in educational reform today – especially as this means the viability and success of PLCs will likely be measured by student achievement scores.

Historical Overview of Professional Development

In response to the rapidly expanding knowledge base in education in the early 1980s, professional development for teachers took on new importance. Professional development, or staff development as it was commonly referred to at that time, became an important mechanism for districts to ensure teachers were

kept abreast of the knowledge that educational research was providing (Casanova, Berliner & Powell, 1994).

Hence, districts became better at designing, organizing, and delivering staff development programs to make certain such information was shared, and coordinated, district-wide opportunities for staff development have been commonplace ever since. While there have been a number of benefits with district driven models of professional development, the risk in providing professional development in this way has always been the underlying assumption that district level administrators know what is best for their teachers (Casanova, Berliner & Powell, 1994).

As districts began to better organize and coordinate staff development, teachers lost their autonomy in identifying both that which they wanted to learn more about and the forum in which they wanted to pursue that learning (i.e. workshops, lectures or advanced courses). The movement to centralize decision-making about professional development situated teachers as outsiders, diminished teacher efficacy, and impacted school culture. At the same time, Joyce and Showers (1988) revealed that without follow-up opportunities for on-site coaching or practice, traditional “sit and get” models of staff training have little effect on the classroom practices of teachers. Thus, researchers and policy makers began to evaluate and rethink what might work best in terms of professional development opportunities for teachers to promote a professional

culture, boost teacher efficacy, support instructional improvement, and allow schools to function as learning organizations.

Reform Initiatives Involving Collegiality and Collaboration

Researchers have long recognized that the teaching profession is marked by isolationism and that opportunities for teachers to share their craft and work together collaboratively are rare – largely because of the organization of schools as workplaces (Lortie, 1975; Little, 1982, 1990a; Hord, 1986; Rosenholtz, 1989). The lack of opportunity for teachers to work together collegially and collaboratively has been identified as a limiting factor in allowing teachers to improve their practices, enhance student learning, and promote sustainable change in the culture of schools.

As researchers suggested that collaborative networks could support instructional improvement (Eisner, 1983; Rosenholtz, 1989), calls to restructure schools to facilitate collegial and collaborative environments increased (Fullan, 1993). Since then, professional development initiatives designed to provide opportunities for teachers to work together collegially and collaboratively have taken on variety of forms including teacher mentoring, induction, and coaching programs, the formation of programs that encourage peer observation and support, and the practice of organizing teachers into collaborative teams that promote opportunities for shared experiences, learning and decision making (i.e. communities of practice, collaborative study groups, critical friend groups). In recent years, reform initiatives have closely associated collaborative teams with

what have been coined *professional learning communities*. Professional learning communities are rooted in the practices of collaboration and/or collegiality.

There is widespread recognition of the value of a shared, collaborative philosophy in schools (Barth et al., 2005). Though many researchers acknowledge the impact of collaboration in deepening teachers' knowledge, building their skills, and improving instruction (Bryk et al., 1999; Calkings et al., 2007; Goddard et al., 2007; Louis & Marks, 1998; Supovitz & Christman, 2003), other researchers have revealed the complexity involved and conflicts inherent in collaborative types of professional development – especially as teachers' roles and responsibilities collide with deeply entrenched norms in school cultures and with the externally mandated policies in education today (Wood, 2007).

Consequently, what researchers have previously identified in their efforts to understand collaborative interactions and professional learning communities in schools is important to this inquiry. Much of the research on collaboration either cites, furthers, supports or refutes the ideas and work of Judith Warren Little. Hence, her work has been allowed considerable space in this review of the literature alongside other landmark studies or work on collaboration and collegiality from Susan Rosenholtz, Shirley Hord, Ann Lieberman and Rick Dufour.

One of the groundbreaking studies on teachers' collegiality came from Judith Warren Little almost three decades ago. In *Norms of collegiality and experimentation: Workplace conditions of school success* (Little, 1982), Little

studied six schools in order to gain insight into what ways the social organization of schools as workplaces were conducive to teachers “learning on the job.” In this ethnographic study, Little and her team characterized teachers’ interactions based on the actors (who interacted with whom), the location of the interaction (classroom, faculty lounge, or department meeting), and by the business or topic of discussion during the interaction (sharing materials, curriculum design, or classroom experiences/stories). Four types of what they established as collegial practices, coined “critical practices of adaptability,” emerged as clearly distinguishing more successful and adaptable schools from less successful and adaptable schools. These critical practices of adaptability and collegiality were identified as: 1) Support for discussion of classroom practices, 2) Mutual observation and critique, 3) Efforts made to design and prepare curriculum, and 4) Shared participation in the business of instructional improvement (Little, 1982, p. 332).

Little found other important indicators of collegiality at work during this study. She observed that in successful and adaptable schools, all four types of critical practice occurred throughout the school and throughout the work week as evidence of collegial interactions were frequent, pervading the school during staff meetings, grade level or department meetings, and in hallways, workrooms and teachers’ lounges. She noted that during these collegial interactions, teachers appeared to understand a shared and common vocabulary which allowed them to use more concrete language when describing, analyzing, interpreting, and

evaluating their teaching practices. Little believed this shared vocabulary led to a greater potential for these collegial interactions to influence teachers' practices. However, Little also observed that precise description and analysis of classroom practices was not without risks, as some teachers saw these experiences as threatening and as having the potential to expose their knowledge, skills and experiences, or lack thereof, thereby having the potential to negatively impact teachers' confidence and self-esteem.

Little found collegial interactions among teachers to be reciprocal in successful schools. Reciprocal, by Little's definition, meant that all participants participated equally. But reciprocity almost meant a respect for *deference*, defined by Little as "a manner of acting and speaking which demonstrates an understanding that an evaluation of one's practices is very near to an evaluation of one's competence, and which demonstrates great care in distinguishing the two and focusing on the first" (Little, 1982, p. 335). The varied degrees of reciprocity were contingent upon levels of trust on the part of the participants.

Important in her early work, Little noticed that:

Quite simply, there are relatively few occasions and relatively few places during the course of the school day where teachers find themselves in one another's presence. The more of those occasions and places that are considered appropriate for professional work, the more support there appears to be for visible, continuous learning on the job. (Little, 1982, p. 333)

However, Little cautioned researchers from speculating that the frequency of collegial interactions among teachers was in some way directly correlated to their professional growth. More important than frequency, Little argued, was the

degree to which teachers saw the value in collegiality. The greater teachers saw the value of the practice, the greater their commitment to their shared, collegial participation (Little, 1982). The success of collegiality was dependent on both the workplace conditions and on the characteristics and dispositions of the participants.

Little concluded that in successful and adaptable schools, “teacher evaluations, access to resources, release time, and other prerequisites are clearly tied to collegial participation in the improvement of practice” (Little, 1982, p. 334). Staff development proved consequential to the degree that its design and conduct (not merely its intent) stimulated or strengthened these critical practices.

In a subsequent study, *The persistence of privacy: Autonomy and initiative in teachers’ professional relationships*, Little (1990a) noted the difficulty in unpacking and defining the collegial practices of teachers. She observed that collegiality “has remained conceptually amorphous and ideologically sanguine” (Little, p. 509). Little observed that collaboration (or collegiality, as Little continued to use the two interchangeably) as a practice occurred naturally when teachers identified problems that they might have in common. However, she cautioned that much of what passes for collaboration was in her words, “contrived, inauthentic, grafted on, perched precariously (and often temporarily) on the margins of real work” (Little, p. 510). She challenged that the assumed link between increased collegial contact as automatically enhancing teachers’

understandings of their teaching practices and as creating a school culture of improvement-oriented change did not seem to be warranted.

Thus, Little tried to look harder at the circumstances in schools that foster or inhibit collegiality or collaboration. She conceptualized four different forms of collegiality, and she placed them on a continuum regarding their potential to develop or promote conditions of independence, as opposed to interdependence, amongst teachers. The forms of collegiality she identified, along with related circumstances or consequences Little identified that may inhibit or promote collegiality as a practice, include:

1. Storytelling and scanning for ideas -- Recognizing the diversity in stories and the varied influences that they may exert on teachers' practice, Little noted that compressed for time, teachers' exchanges of their own classroom stories may actually inhibit analysis and inventiveness if such stories are observed as "complaining" (Little, 1990a, p. 513).
2. Aid and assistance – In this form, Little noted the problematic character of "help-giving." Working within an egalitarian culture, Little asserted that teachers usually give help and advice only when asked. She observed that a "learning by asking" culture may seriously limit the degree to which teachers share their practices – thereby, sustaining individualist practices as teachers withhold their stores of knowledge, methods and materials in order to preserve their individual reputations (p. 517).
3. Sharing – Little identified the hidden costs of sharing one's expertise as, "the risk of added planning and preparation burden (as teachers replace the ideas that have been 'given away') and an erosion of the corpus of ideas, methods, and materials that serve as the basis of individual reputations, giving teachers distinctive identities and status" (p. 519).
4. Joint work – Little described joint work as encounters that are rooted in a sense of shared responsibility and collective action on the part of teachers – and as having the most potential to create interdependence

amongst teachers. According to Little, joint work is responsive to larger institutional purposes, but it is vulnerable to external manipulations. At the heart of joint work are the intellectual, social and emotional demands of teaching. Little found that teachers are motivated to jointly participate with one another to the degree that they believe it may be necessary to collaborate with others in order to be successful in meeting the demands of their work. Conversely, Little found that motivation to work together is lessened when teachers perceive that success or satisfaction can be just as easily achieved alone, or even in competition with other teachers (p. 520).

Citing existing studies that discussed meaningful groups in a variety of organizational settings, Little (1990a) came up with four aspects of professional communities that she believed were important to investigate in order to understand collegial interactions in schools: 1) the number and heterogeneity of groups within the school, 2) differences among groups regarding their professional beliefs and practices – especially as those beliefs are rooted in teachers' evolving identities and as they exist in relation to the demands within schools as institutions, 3) individual teacher's multiple group affiliations within the school and among a wider professional community, and 4) the degree of fit between naturally occurring collaborative groups in schools that are promoted or induced in the service of special programs or in response to outside initiatives (Little, p. 529).

Little (1990b) noted practical benefits for teachers and school communities when teachers work together collegially. Benefits she cited include: the orchestration of teachers' daily work is improved as teachers support one another, the school community gains confidence as persons better understand the programs taught across the school, and that teachers become more flexible in

times of change and are better able to cope with new demands that would normally exhaust the energies of teachers working in isolation (Jarzabkowski, 1999). But Little (1990a) cautioned that the most common configuration of teachers' interactions with one another may do more to bolster isolation than to diminish it. She called for further studies about collaboration that would look more closely at the content of collaboration, privileging content over form.

Over the next two decades Little and other researchers (Aguirre, 2002) continued to acknowledge the difficulty in understanding how classroom teaching practices come to be known, shared and developed among teachers during their interactions and in the course of their everyday work in schools. Questioning the premise that teachers' knowledge, practices, and commitments are necessarily improved when teachers participate in professional communities, Little (2003) studied two high school teacher groups in order to determine what dynamics of professional practice were evident in teacher-led groups that considered themselves collaborative and innovative. Drawing on the work of researchers outside the field of education, Little attempted to understand the processes and practices by which people in the workplace learn, construct, coordinate and transform their practices. In this study, Little focused on the construction of professional practices with respect to teachers' identities, and further, how these practices and identities were positioned with respect to the relationships of teachers and the socialization processes within the schools.

Little found that teachers' talk and exchanges were difficult to unpack and interpret for the following reasons: 1) Teachers' accounts of classroom practice generally rely on condensed narratives that may be more opaque, rather than transparent, 2) Classroom accounts are selective and may be situationally relevant in a specific time and space – thus leading to difficult questions about whose representation matters most at a later time, 3) Accounts of classroom practice tend to be time-compressed and have an ephemeral character/tone to them, and 4) Little found that teacher talk “both conveys and constructs what it means to teach and to be a teacher” (Little, p. 935). Thus, it is embedded with values and is incredibly complex to unpack because it is rooted in teachers' concepts of identity.

Throughout her research, Little acknowledged the importance of situating the collaborative experiences of teachers within the context of schools as workplaces. Of particular interest to Little were the participation patterns of teachers and how opportunities to learn were collectively shaped, co-constructed and distributed (Little, 2003). Little (2002) found that most collaboration amongst teachers involves teachers' representations of their work either expressed verbally or by sharing lesson plans, student work, or other artifacts of practice. Little proposed that what teachers learn from their collaborative work with their colleagues is contingent upon the transparency with which teachers represent their practice, and the specificity and completeness with which they share what they do. She concluded that the face of practice that teachers choose to make public

for their own reflection and for others' learning or critique is a key factor affecting what teachers might learn from their collaborative work (Little, 2002).

The implications of Little's work on educational policy continue to be significant as policy-makers persist in trying to determine whether and what kind of investments in teachers' time together outside the classroom might produce or support instructional improvement inside the classroom. Salient throughout Little's work is the recognition of the complexity of language in collaborative exchanges. She remained keenly aware that the collaborative interactions of teachers worked to open up or close down their opportunities to learn during the exchanges. She observed that the particulars of language are fundamental to any community or practice, and that they pose challenges to newcomers, including researchers (Little, 2003). Thus, Little alleged that teachers' learning is both enabled and constrained, simultaneously, by the ways that teachers go about their work (Little, 2003).

Susan Rosenholtz's (1989) study of "learning enriched" versus "learning impoverished" schools is also considered a landmark study among researchers' attempts to understand teachers' collaboration in the workplace. Rosenholtz found that in schools she considered "learning enriched," collaboration led to improved, collective teacher learning, greater understanding about what teachers believed was effective, higher levels of teacher commitment, and greater gains in student achievement. Rosenholtz and Simpson (1990) later linked teachers' sense of value and their level of teaching experience as significant in terms of

influencing their commitment levels to their profession and to their schools. They found that teachers, especially experienced teachers, reported greater levels of commitment to their profession if they felt a sense of autonomy in their work, and that teachers of all experience levels who felt competent and valued for that competence were apt to try harder to improve their performance.

Hargreaves (1991) argued that there is no such thing as real collaboration or collegiality – but rather, only different forms of collegiality that have different consequences and that serve different purposes. Hargreaves (1992) proposed that to understand collegiality, school culture should be viewed with respect to content (evidenced by what teachers say, do and think based on their shared values, beliefs and assumptions), with respect to form, and by the patterns of relationships between colleagues. Differing from Little, Hargreaves maintained that researchers studying collegiality should privilege the forms of teacher culture over content, as:

...it is through them that the contents of teacher cultures – the norms, values, beliefs and practices of teachers – are reproduced or redefined. It is through working with their colleagues in particular ways, or working apart from them altogether, that teachers either persist in doing what they do or seek and develop ways to change their practices. Understanding the major forms of teacher culture can therefore help us understand much about the dynamic of educational change. (Hargreaves, 1992, p. 231-232)

Hargreaves (1991) identified five basic forms of work culture amongst teachers: 1) Individualism – where teachers remain isolated from one another, 2) Balkanisation – where groups of teachers compete with one another for power, status and resources, 3) Collaborative -- environments that foster openness, trust

and support amongst colleagues and that capitalize on teachers' collective expertise, acknowledging and respecting that teachers' work is embedded in their lives, 4) Contrived collegiality – where interactions with one another are seen as administratively regulated, where attendance is compulsory, and the focus is on an implementation of mandates proposed by outsiders rather than on teacher development, and 5) Mosaic -- where shifting patterns within the work environment are recognized. Hargreave's portrayals of contrived collegiality and collaborative cultures are frequently cited by subsequent researchers, and he is often recognized for suggesting that the two exist in opposition to one another (Jarzabkowski, 1999). Hargreaves defended "individualism" as a form of work culture, suggesting that it is foolish to presume that all teacher individualism is wrong. He argued that important aspects of teacher individualism such as care, individuality, creativity and solitude should not be purged for the sake of embracing collegiality (Jarzabkowski, 1999).

Hargreaves (1991) was one of the first to opine that educational reform initiatives in the form of collegiality and collaboration have been an imposition on teachers. He argued that forcing teachers to plan and work together is unproductive (Hargreaves, 1994). Coerced into participation, Hargreaves observed that teachers conform and engage in contrived collaboration. He speculated that reform initiatives under the guise of "collaboration and collegiality" may be just another exercise in organizational power. Smyth (1991) concurred, maintaining that the introduction of collegial practices has been

another form of central control disguised as local autonomy to further harness teachers to the work of economic restructuring.

Other researchers have battered about, extended, supported or refuted the important contributions from these early studies on collaboration and collegiality. While acknowledging their groundbreaking work, Fielding (1999) criticized both Little (1982) and Hargreaves (1992) for their lack of distinction between the ideas of collaboration and collegiality. He distinguished collaboration from collegiality by suggesting that collaboration is a form of individualism because it is often rooted in self-interest. Fielding explained that collaboration is, “fundamentally instrumental and focused strongly on intended gains, [and that] those operating in this mode are typically intolerant of time spent on anything other than the task in hand or the core purposes of the business” (Fielding, 1999, p. 17). Fielding defined collegiality as more communal in form and substance in that “its intentions and practices make no sense outside a way of life and a tradition which is expressive of collective aspiration” (Fielding, 1999, p. 17). Fielding further criticized Little and Hargreaves for their lack of attempts to understand and recognize the importance of culture as the interplay between ontological beliefs and the very nature of social and political life in schools.

Noting the benefits accrued to individual teachers, to groups, or to workplaces or organizations as a result of their collegial interactions, Jennifer Nias (1998) privileged form over content, like Hargreaves. However, Nias noted

the near impossibility of understanding either the form or content of collegial interactions in isolation from one another. According to Nias:

... it is impossible to separate the substance of collaboration from its form: the substance (the interrelationship of group and individual) takes form through interactions, structures, ceremonies, personal behaviours, distributions of power and authority which in turn facilitate and reinforce the substance. The working relationships (form) which exist among staff in school (and other organisations) with a culture of collaboration are both the product and the cause of their shared social and moral belief (substance). (Nias, 1995, p. 311)

Craig Ihara (1988), too, advocated that researchers continue to try to unpack the nebulous nature of collegiality. Ihara cautioned that if collegiality is not better understood, it may consequently have little impact. Ihara noted that collegiality is often used as a means to protect or assert a group's interest. But he believed collegiality could be understood in less sinister ways, too, as a set of obligations to colleagues and a kind of virtue that involves a connectedness to one another, based on respect for professional expertise and a commitment to the goals and values of the profession. Ihara appreciated that collegiality is virtually not sustainable by only one party. Rather, he understood collegiality as being reciprocal and dependent on the respect between professionals, and that it is largely dependent on persons' dispositions and attitude.

Shirley Hord (1986) compared and contrasted the concept of collaboration with cooperation. She used Lanier's (1979) metaphor of family activity to establish the distinction between the two. According to Lanier, a parent and child interact cooperatively when a parent allows his/her child's rock band to practice in their home, or conversely, when the child helps the parent prepare for guests of

the parent. These acts are cooperative in that they are mutually agreeable, but they are not mutually beneficial. Lanier explained that collaborative acts differ in that they involve all members of a group or family contributing to the well-being of the group by offering their expertise in ways that are mutually beneficial to the whole group. Hord established that collaboration and cooperation each serve different purposes, require different kinds of input, have different limitations, and each yields a different return under specific circumstances.

Casanova, Berliner & Powell's study (1994) of teachers' collegial groups has implications with respect to understanding collegiality and teacher efficacy. Insisting that teachers can be trusted to determine what might be in their best professional interests to learn about and discuss, they developed the *Readings in Educational Research* (RER), a project designed to allow teachers to select research they would like to know more about and then meet with colleagues to discuss. Casanova, Berliner, and Powell reported that a large majority of the teachers that participated in the RER project appreciated that their discussions in collegial groups fostered an atmosphere of sharing and joint work. Further, they noted that by participating in these collegial experiences, teachers understood that they may have dismantled some of the barriers that tend to keep the practices of teachers, private. But they also acknowledged that a small number of teachers participating in the RER project did not believe that their participation in the collegial study groups was useful to their own professional growth and development, indicating that some teachers may not recognize a link between the

opportunity to share ideas with colleagues and their own professional learning and development.

Like Little and Hord, Ann Lieberman (1986a) found that schools are more likely to be successful with positive benefits to both adults and students when teachers feel they have maximum autonomy to collectively engage in their work. Lieberman showed that this sense of autonomy included that teachers first be trusted to work together to identify problems, and then actively and collectively participate in dialogue that addresses and confronts these problems. She noted that the forms of collaborative activities in schools are as varied as the numbers and kinds of teachers involved, and further, that the context of such collaborative work differs, as do the needs, talents, and commitment levels of the participants. Lieberman recognized the challenges, difficulties and complexities of establishing collaborative working situations in schools.

In a follow up article, Lieberman (1986b) revealed what teachers identified were important factors that contributed to their positive attitudes towards school, and those that they believed were important to foster a positive environment where collaborative work might be sustainable within schools. According to Lieberman, teachers identified the following as the main factors that kept them feeling positive about their work: 1) students – and the interaction with and the capacity to influence them, 2) personal characteristics – the challenge and pride that comes with working as a teachers, 3) adults – the reinforcement, recognition, and respect from colleagues and administrators, 4) curriculum – the

freedom and resources to be creative and innovative, and 5) setting – consistency in individual teacher’s values and expectations with respect to the lived demands and expectations specific to their assigned grade level or school (Lieberman, 1986b, p. 30). Clear to Lieberman was the idea that positive factors in school are not solely responsible for individual teachers’ personalities, but that other factors contribute to their overall feelings of positiveness. Lieberman concluded that the degree to which teachers feel positive about their work may impact the kinds of interactions they participate in or with their colleagues.

A review of literature on collaboration would not be complete without including the work of one of the leading practitioners in the area of collaborative forms of professional development, Rick Dufour. Dufour defines collaboration as, “a systematic process in which people work together, interdependently, to analyze and impact professional practice in order to improve individual or collective results” (DuFour, 2004b, p. 8). Dufour and Eaker (1998) endorse collaboration on the part of teachers as the single most important factor to ensure student learning in schools. They have found that creating teams of teachers is one of the most effective ways to promote collaboration, but they stress that four prerequisites must occur before teams are organized: First, time for collaboration must be embedded within the school day, week, and year. DuFour and Eaker (1998) insist that collaboration by invitation only is ineffective, and they maintain that meaningful opportunities for collaboration must be embedded into the daily life of the school in order for collaborative cultures to take root. Second, the

purposes of collaboration must be made explicit to all participants. Third, participants must have opportunities for training and support in their efforts to learn about and become effective collaborators. And finally, educators must acknowledge and accept both their individual and collective responsibilities for working together as professional colleagues.

The present fervor for collaboration and collegiality cannot be sufficiently underscored. One would be hard pressed to find an educational journal, grant, or conference that did not advocate these ideas as the essential key(s) to educational change and school improvement. Though they are endorsed, to varied degrees, as having the potential to improve teachers' professional practices and impact student learning, the concepts themselves are proving complex and difficult to define, unpack and fully understand. Contributing to this complexity and lack of understanding is the fact that the terms collegiality and collaboration have been and continue to be used interchangeably, and further, that researchers have not universally agreed upon definitions for what might constitute collaboration versus collegiality. Regardless, collaboration and/or collegiality are at the very heart of educational reform in the form of professional learning communities. And creating a collaborative work environment is purported to be the single most important factor in creating a positive culture for professional learning communities to flourish (Dufour and Eaker, 1998).

Professional Learning Communities

Professional learning communities, then, are rooted in the early ideas of Judith Little and her work on collegiality and Susan Rosenholtz's study of what she coined "learning enriched" and "learning impoverished" schools. In both cases, schools where teachers consistently worked together to improve their instruction were thought to be better schools (Fullan, 2006). But credit for the concept is also given to Peter Senge (1990). In an attempt to impact the way "business" is conducted in the business world, Senge created a vision of a "learning organization" around five key disciplines: developing personal mastery, creating mental models, building shared vision, improving and emphasizing team learning based on dialogue, and understanding systems thinking that integrates the four other disciplines (Hughes and Kritsonis, 2006). As Senge's concept was shared with educators and transferred to the field of education, the learning organization name was changed to learning communities (Hughes and Kritsonis, 2006).

According to Vescio et al. (2008), learning communities specific to education are grounded in two assumptions. First, that knowledge is situated in the day-to-day lived experiences of teachers and is best understood through critical reflection with others who share the same experience. And second, that teachers actively engaging in PLCs will increase their professional knowledge and enhance student learning.

Descriptors and definitions of PLCs vary, and the term has been used so ubiquitously to describe every imaginable combination of individuals that some researchers have warned it may lose all meaning (DuFour, 2004b). Hord (1997) defines professional learning communities as places where teachers and administrators meet in order to continuously seek and share personal practice and learning and then, act on their learning with the goal of enhancing their effectiveness as professionals for the benefit of their students. Eaker, DuFour, and DuFour (2002) define learning communities as collaborative teams that work interdependently in an ongoing process of collective inquiry to look for better ways to achieve common goals for the benefit of the learning of every student. Schmoker's (2006) definition is similar. He asserts that collaborative learning communities establish and teach concise curricular standards -- focusing on improving student learning as measured by common assessments. Despite slight variations in how different researchers have conceptualized PLCs, commonly PLCs are thought to be comprised of groups of educators who are committed to working together through a process of shared inquiry to promote and sustain the learning of all professionals in the school community with the collective purpose of improving teaching practices and increasing student achievement (Bullough, 2007; DuFour and Eaker, 1998; Vescio et al., 2008).

Generally speaking, five essential characteristics emerge as common descriptors of PLCs (Vescio et al., 2008; Newmann and Wehlage, 1995). First, members of PLCs establish shared values and norms with regard to the group's

collective view about children, their ability to learn, the proper roles of parents, teachers, and administrators and about prioritizing the use of time and space in schools (Newmann and Wehlage, 1995). Second, members focus on student learning as opposed to focusing on teaching (Dufour, 2004b). Third, members routinely engage in reflective dialogue that leads to “extensive and continuing conversations among teachers about curriculum, instruction, and student development” (Newmann and Wehlage, 1995). Fourth, members remain committed to sharing their practices -- which promotes the deprivatization of teaching practices intended to promote problem solving among members and enhance student learning (Kruse, Louis, and Bryk, 1995; Dufour et al., 2004). Fifth, members remain committed to the practice of collaboration, extending conversations beyond superficial exchanges of support (Kruse, Louis, and Bryk, 1995).

There is broad agreement in the literature that members of PLCs agree to share a “collective responsibility” for the learning of all students (Stoll et al., 2006; Dufour et al., 2004). Promoting a collective responsibility helps to reduce the isolation pervasive in education, and it sustains teachers’ commitment to participate in PLCs. Further, researchers contend that a shared sense of responsibility puts peer pressure and accountability on those who do not do their fair share (Newmann and Wehlage, 1995).

Richard and Rebecca DuFour’s and Robert Eaker’s model of PLCs is widely considered the gold standard in PLCs at the minute. According to them,

three big ideas represent the core ideas for professional learning communities: 1) There must be a shift from a focus on teaching, to a focus on student learning, 2) Persons within schools must work to create a culture of collaboration where teachers feel a collective responsibility for all student learning, and 3) There must be a focus on results in the form of student learning (DuFour, 2004b). The latter is significant as the success of PLCs is largely thought to be measured by and contingent upon student achievement scores.

In *Professional Learning Communities at Work* (1998), Dufour and Eaker establish that essential characteristics of their model of professional learning communities include that participants: 1) Share missions, visions, understandings, and values and a commitment to the guiding principles of collaborative work, 2) Engage in ongoing collective inquiry that questions the status quo and that seeks, tests and reflects on new methods tried, 3) Share a common goal of enhancing the knowledge and skills of all participants, 4) Commit to action orientation and a willingness to experiment, 5) Commit to continuous improvement as a way to conduct day-to-day business, and 6) Focus on results – rather than intentions (DuFour and Eaker, p. 23-29).

Like Little, the DuFours and Eaker recognize that the structure of the school as a workplace is a potential inhibiting factor to the development of PLCs. They maintain that time for collaboration must be built into the school day or

school calendar to allow for collaborative groups to meet regularly, at least once a week, in order for PLCs to be successful.¹

Most researchers agree that two conditions must be met in order for PLCs to begin successfully in schools. The first conditions are structural in that schools need to allow time for teachers to meet and talk. Thus, schools are arranged in ways that recognize teachers' interdependent teaching roles and responsibilities, so that teachers that may naturally collaborate with one another are placed in close physical proximity within the schools to allow for those teachers to meet (Kruse et al., 1995; Fullan, 2006). The second condition involves creating a school culture based on trust and respect, with strong, supportive leaders that focus on openness and improvement (Kruse et al., 1995; Fullan, 2006).

Learning Communities: Lessons from the Past

While the current catch-phrase, *professional learning communities* (and its related PLC acronym), is fairly new and novel, the concept of educators participating in like learning communities is not. Kridel and Bullough (2007) remind educators and researchers of an often-forgotten and consistently misrepresented moment in the history of American education: the Eight-Year Study, during which such communities formed and flourished. Rooted in the Progressive Education Movement, the Eight-Year Study (which ran for 12 years, from 1930-1942) sought to establish relationships between secondary educators

¹ An aside: The Dufour and Eaker model of a PLC is endorsed by the District in which this study took place. More information about the Dufour and Eaker model of PLCs was included in Chapter One of this dissertation.

and those from colleges and universities in ways that allowed them to work together and engage in school experimentation that might result in the complete restructuring of secondary schools to better meet the needs of students.

According to Kridel and Bullough, the prevailing thinking during this time was that college admission standards were hindering the possibility of innovation within secondary schools, rendering any real change almost impossible. Context being important, given the rapidly changing social conditions occurring at this time as a result of the economic depression, the changes were thought to be important and necessary by many.

The Eight-Year Study was originally sponsored by the Progressive Education Association of the time, and it later received support from the Carnegie Foundation and the General Education Board. Throughout the study virtually every aspect of the school day of secondary students was reconsidered. Participants shared a commitment to democratic social ideals and tried to work towards the development of a curriculum that reflected those values. In some participating schools, no curriculum was set out in advance, and teachers and students collaborating and planning curricula together became a central part of teaching and learning. Promoting democratic practices and addressing citizenship aims were important goals in these settings. With time to think about curriculum, participating teachers developed a belief that textbooks no longer constituted a reliable basic curriculum, and they found themselves searching for new materials, organized in new ways. They began to view teaching and learning differently,

embracing the ideas of resource units and the thematic organization of materials. Many abandoned the transmission approach to teaching in pursuit of more interactive approaches to teaching in their classrooms. Teachers no longer saw themselves as drill masters, and they began focusing more on student growth and learning. Supporting these efforts, teacher study groups and curriculum councils became common practice.

Evaluation committees that would develop procedures for gathering data in order to guide program development and teacher decision making (and that would judge any results of this work) became important during this time. In 1934, Ralph Tyler was appointed to lead the Committee on Evaluation for the entire study. The manner in which Tyler organized this evaluation may be one of the most relevant reasons to revisit the Eight-Year Study. Tyler purposefully chose to listen to participants and allow them to clarify their own purposes for assessment. This meant that:

... aims set by the participating schools would drive evaluation. The intent from the beginning was to gather data of many kinds thought useful for informed decision-making; data on not only academic performance but also school activities of students, their interests, and their concerns. The efforts of the evaluation committee encouraged and focused discussion on school philosophy and on making purposes clear. (Bullough, 2007, p. 174)

Tyler and his evaluation team shared a position that honored students' attitudes, beliefs and values as much as their academic performance. The evaluation team and many participants staunchly maintained that different forms of data would need to be gathered in order to shed light on the various aspects of

student development. When it looked like “the Carnegie Foundation’s interest in standardized testing might shift the study’s focus from curriculum development, several school heads and teachers revolted – arguing not against testing per se, but its narrow focus on traditional content” (Bullough, 2007, p. 175). Tyler warned against an over-reliance on test scores and on test technicians, maintaining that teachers were fully capable of developing valid assessment instruments used to gather data, as well as using skill and intelligence in reviewing data in recommending and accomplishing systematic change.

Teacher growth and development was an important part of this study. Participants understood that quality programs were dependent on quality teachers, and that school reform efforts were contingent upon teacher development. Thus, throughout the study all parties remained committed to creating the conditions that might support teacher growth and development. According to Bullough, “The view was that because teaching demands everything of teachers, investment in their entire beings, investment in the teacher as a person, was understood to be an investment in student learning, as well” (Bullough, 2007, p. 176).

During the Eight-Year Study, “educators determined which problems to study and engaged in data-driven cycles of reflection and action... [and] teachers were trusted to formulate issues for study and... within the workshops, to carry those studies to a conclusion” (Bullough, 2007, p. 176). Even though teachers were not compensated financially or by credit for their participation in workshops during the Eight-Year Study, attendance was high. Also important to note is the

role administrators played in this study. Administrators made a sincere effort to make accommodations in scheduling in order to create and allow teachers opportunities to meet during the school day, even if it meant larger class sizes.

Participants in the Eight-Year Study began by questioning and challenging traditional curricular assumptions and with the mindset that by freeing secondary schools from the prevailing college admissions standards of the time, large scale program changes and innovations might ensue. But what participants found is that changes, if any, would come slowly as a result of the deeply entrenched practices of “schooling” (Bullough, 2007; Tyack and Cuban, 1995). During the study, participants realized that at least some school conditions, cultures, and customary practices seemed to stifle innovation and change, and further, that many teachers resisted changes because they mistrusted the freedoms allowed by the new college requirements for college entrance (Bullough, 2007).

Bullough reminds researchers that many theorists have long supported the idea that teachers are capable of identifying important questions and dilemmas of practice to discuss, of systematically seeking answers to these questions and dilemmas, and of constructing knowledge and identifying solutions to these questions and dilemmas that are both rooted in educational theory and based on their own lived classroom experiences. The results of the Eight-Year Study caution persons from over-relying on test scores as indicators of student development, and challenge any underlying assumptions within school reform initiatives that teachers and schools need to look to outside authorities for school

reform. Further, the finding that school culture is difficult to change is both relevant and significant today as current educational reform initiatives center on providing opportunities for teachers to collaborate, with the hope their collaborative efforts will positively impact school culture and perpetuate systemic change.

Celebrations and Challenges: Early Research

PLCs are a fairly new addition on the landscape of educational reform initiatives. Still in the early stages of development, researchers differ about what distinguishes successful professional learning communities from other collaborative work and with respect to what criteria to use to determine the success of PLCs. Much of what has been written about PLCs is in the form of “how to” literature. And though professional journals are sated with articles extolling the merits of professional learning communities as an important way to organize professional development in schools, fewer studies have moved beyond teachers’ perceptions and self-reports of the positive impact of PLCs (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008), and less considers other potential benefits of teachers’ participation in professional learning communities.

That being said, a small but growing body of research substantiates claims that participation in collaborative professional learning communities positively impacts teaching practices and improves student learning (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). Kruse, Louis, and Bryk (1995) studied elementary, middle and high schools and found that schools operating as professional learning

communities did increase student achievement and had a positive impact on the classroom practices of teachers. Goddard, Goddard, and Tschannen-Moran (2007) were one of the first research teams to link teacher collaboration to student achievement on high-stakes assessments. Controlling for school and student variance, this research team showed that collaboration for school improvement purposes led to improved test scores in math and reading in 4th and 8th grade.

Adjusting for grade level and student background, Louis and Marks (1998) showed a correlation between the presence of cohesive professional communities and the use of desirable pedagogical practices amongst teachers. They determined that cohesive professional communities lead to higher levels of social support for achievement and higher levels of authentic pedagogy. Louis and Marks defined authentic pedagogy as “emphasizing higher order thinking, the construction of meaning through conversation, and the development of depth of knowledge that has value beyond the classroom” (Vescio et al., 2008). Though the results seem hard to believe, they reported that the strength of PLCs accounts for as much as 85% of the variance in student achievement in schools (Levine and Marcus, 2009).

A systematic review of fourteen studies of collaborative forms of professional development corroborates the findings of these researchers, indicating that the presence of ongoing professional collaboration is “linked to measured increases in student performance in all the studies” (Cordingley, Bell, Rundell, & Evans, 2003, p. 4). However, some researchers caution that

measurable improvements in student achievement occur only within PLCs that focus on changing the instructional practices of their teachers (Supovitz and Christman, 2003). Other researchers go even further, suggesting that sharing instructional strategies and practices is not enough to impact learning, and concluding that learning communities are most effective when teachers focus on evidence of student learning (Bolam et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2008).

Much of the existing research purporting the link between teachers' collaboration and student learning emphasizes the value of PLCs as a means to discrete, short term ends in the form of data-driven improvements and higher tests scores (Piazza et al., 2009). There are fewer examples of research that examine other potential benefits, including the capacity to change teacher beliefs or practices about teaching or learning (Piazza et al., 2009), or the potential of PLCs to transform schools as institutions, altogether. Indeed, the path between professional communities and instructional improvement is not direct, largely because of the fact that student learning is contingent upon many factors, and because instructional improvement may be only one of a school's many purposes.

Some researchers have cited other potential benefits that emerge in schools that have established professional learning communities. In a review of 11 studies, Vescio et al. (2008) reported that the establishment of PLCs contributes to a fundamental shift in the habits of mind that teachers bring to their work, which can have a significant impact on the professional culture of a school. In their review of the literature on PLCs, they found that participation in

professional learning communities positively impacts teaching practices and teachers' morale, promotes teacher authority by giving teachers the ability to make decisions about the process of their learning communities and with respect to aspects of school governance, and favors professional development that is driven by the needs of teachers as they are naturally engaged in efforts to accomplish their goals. They found that teams that focused on instructional practices and on student learning reported positive changes in the instructional culture at their schools.

Other researchers conclude that giving teachers the power to make decision about their own learning process is essential to improving students' learning. Bolam et al. (2005) indicated that "teachers saw a clear connection between their own professional learning opportunities within the PLC and changes in their practices and student learning" (Vescio et al., 2008). Supovitz and Christman (2003) used survey data to compare team-based teachers' perceptions with those that were not grouped into teams and found similar evidence, reporting that team-based teachers felt more involved in a variety of school-related decisions.

Jarzabkowski (2001), too, faulted early research for neglecting to recognize other, significant social benefits of teacher collegiality in the workplace. She noted that when collaborating with colleagues, teachers negotiate, contest and impact workplace culture throughout their working lives in the school. Jarzabkowski found that social interaction among teachers has two

potential benefits. First, collegial relationships promote better working relationships among teachers, which may improve the quality of teaching and learning. And second, positive interactions among teachers may promote an emotionally healthy workplace, which benefits both teachers and students. Jarzabkowski posited that the social support and relationships that develop during collegial exchanges can actually reduce teacher stress, tension and burnout.

That collegiality may reduce teacher stress and burnout, especially within the context of high-stakes testing and measures of accountability in place today, is significant. Jarzabkowski and other researchers (Fine, 1988; Woods, 1984; Nias, 1998) acknowledged that social play and laughter at work may increase teachers' satisfaction and productivity, "by changing the definition of the work environment from an institution of coercive control to an arena in which the workers have some measure of control over the conditions of their employment" (Fine, 1998, p. 120, as quoted in Jarzabkowski, 2001, p. 6). Further, laughter may contribute to the emotional health of teachers, neutralizing the alienating effects of schools as institutions (Woods, 1984, p. 190 as quoted in Jarzabkowski, 2001, p. 6). Lambert (2003), too, recognized the positive effects of participation in PLCs, reporting that teachers benefit from mutual regard and caring when regularly meeting with colleagues. Beck (1999) agreed, explaining that teachers frequently equate their participation in learning communities with the intimacy of a family or small village, thereby meeting relationship needs.

McLaughlin and Talbert (1993) revealed that teachers who work cohesively in professional communities report high levels of commitment to teaching all students, high levels of energy and enthusiasm for teaching, and high levels of innovation. Other benefits reported by researchers include greater confidence (Stoll et al., 2006), improved efficacy (Shachar and Schmuelewitz, 1997), positive attitudes toward teaching (Brownell et al., 1997), higher levels of trust among colleagues (Tschannen-Moran, 2001), and reports of teachers feeling less isolated when working in collaborative environments (Erb, 1995).

As with any potential educational reform idea or initiative, professional learning communities are not without concerns. Other researchers have acknowledged the dilemmas, conflicts and tensions inherent in collaborative practices, and they have tried to unpack their impact on the development and success of learning communities.

Michael Fullan (2006) alleges three primary cautions regarding the spread of professional learning communities. First, the catch-phrase has been embraced by many educators and is being used as an umbrella term for many collaborative forms of professional development – in many cases, without educators going very deep into learning and without even recognizing they may not be discussing learning. Second, many educators and administrators are looking at professional learning communities as the latest initiative or innovation as it pertains to student achievement, without recognizing the other positive changes that PLCs might be prompting. Fullan warns that reforms in the form of “latest initiative” or

innovation tend to be discarded rapidly. Third, Fullan explains that PLCs often exist in individual schools as autonomous units but are couched as having the potential to change the entire culture of individual schools. For real systems changes to occur, Fullan maintains that PLCs would need to occur on a much larger scale where schools and districts might learn from one another in order to change the overall culture of school systems.

Servage (2006-07) asserts that it is not enough for collaborative professional learning communities to focus on student learning alone. Without space and opportunity for teachers to reflect, explore and debate the meaning about what they are doing as educators, they may not regard the collaborative work as useful. She advocates that in order to increase the likelihood that collaborative communities will have an impact on school change, researchers need to attend to the assumptions that underlie the collaborative processes in schools -- especially those that result in disagreement and tension amongst participants in learning communities. According to Servage, the assumptions that need further addressing include: 1) The focus on improving student learning is oversimplified as competing interests, scarce resources, and pragmatism continue to impact workplace teaching and learning, 2) Not all persons agree about what students should learn, nor about how students should go about learning, and 3) Researchers need to recognize the influence of government policy makers, corporate interest, and educational publishers in schools (Servage, 2006-07, p. 2). Servage criticizes DuFour and Eaker for their failure to reflect just how non-linear

the process of developing PLCs often is. She cautions against allowing critical reflection to be equated with the analysis of teaching strategies alone, and instead, advocates that researchers engage in critical reflection about the worth or value of that which is being implemented, embracing Paulo Freire's (2004) idea of praxis. Servage explains praxis as the idea that learning and action should inform each other while simultaneously uplifting others and righting injustices. She cautions that unless teachers are allowed opportunities for critical reflection to explore and debate the meaning behind what they do, they may not feel a deep sense of purpose to their collaborative work, nor participate in inquiry that produces lasting school change.

Mitchell (1997) identifies four barriers to the collaboration process: 1) cultural norms of individualism, 2) structural and cultural conditions in schools, 3) differing pedagogical philosophies held by teachers (i.e. teaching the subject versus teaching the whole child), and 4) an absence of a shared professional identity among teachers (Mitchell, 1997, p. 1). She alleges that some teachers may avoid interaction and embrace isolationist norms in order to protect themselves from criticism. Further, she reveals that some teachers may actually prefer individualism in order to have more time with their students or more time in solitude.

Mitchell (1997) recognizes the implications of "teacher identity" with respect to their participation in collaborative forms of professional development. She contends that teachers interpret their professional identities based on

assumptions and beliefs shaped by their own experiences. If these assumptions and beliefs are not shared or acknowledged by colleagues, they can lead to critical attitudes amongst teachers, a lack of trust, and less meaningful collaborative exchanges. According to Mitchell, teachers' willingness to work together is often predicated on mutual degrees of respect and trust that exist as a result of a shared sense of professional identity. And importantly, teachers' interpretations of their professional identity rest on underlying assumptions and normative beliefs they have about themselves as teachers, and the expectations they have of their colleagues – all which are part of the hidden curriculum and the “link between educational attainment and economic well-being” (Mitchell, 1997, p. 5).

Other researchers (Achinstein, 2002; Smylie, 1995) allege that bonded communities rooted in friendships may actually limit teachers' opportunities for professional development as friends reduce access to alternative perspectives and do not address improper professional conduct. Achinstein argues that one of the dilemmas of harmonious communities can be that while promoting positive outcomes, they may become static settings with few mechanisms for reflection, change or transformation. Underplaying dissent in favor of consensus, communities may limit inquiry and fall prey to myopia. Achinstein warns that a potential danger of collaborative reform initiatives lies in reinforcing a type of groupthink that is uncritically accepting of the groups' beliefs and that perpetuates false assumptions that stagnate organizations. In other words, Achinstein explains that the ties that bind can simultaneously unite and restrain. Smylie

(1995) shares similar concerns, explaining that creativity and innovation may be constrained if teachers only have access to others with similar ideas, practices, and experiences. To prevent stagnant or myopic thinking, Smylie recommends that teachers have access to multiple resources and sources of learning when working in collaborative teams.

Achinstein (2002) uses the dimensions of conflict, border politics and ideology to understand professional communities and their inherent risks. She explains that border politics reinforce identities and determine which persons, and whose ideas, are included or excluded in groups. One of Achinstein's key findings includes that, contrary to the importance of harmony and consensus reported in the literature, teachers engaged in collaboration generate and, sometimes, thrive on conflict. Achinstein cautions persons from situating all conflict in PLCs as pathological, dysfunctional or unprofessional. She contends:

... the very communities currently highlighted as successful by the literature may not be as generative or capable of organization learning for fundamental changes as other more conflict-ridden ones... An embracing stance towards conflict involves a community in an inquiry process that explores divergent beliefs and practices of community; and acknowledges and owns responsibilities for conflicts that may result; opens the borders to diverse members and perspectives and at times, questions the organization's premise to change them. (Achinstein, 2002, p. 447)

Communities that can productively engage in conflict, rather than those with low levels of conflict or those that suppress their differences, have a greater potential for continual growth and renewal. Reflection and conflict offer a community the opportunity for change. (Achinstein, 2002, p. 448)

Achinstein recognizes that both within and beyond the schoolhouse walls, the purposes of schooling and the practices of teachers are highly contested,

giving rise to conflict. She advises researchers to avoid glorifying conflict, ignoring its impact on practitioners. She believes that conflict ensues because norms and practices are changed, and some members develop resentment as they situate collaboration as an intrusion that affects their privacy, independence, and professional autonomy. She explains that some teachers experience conflict as stress and burnout, and such conflict may cause fragmentation within the learning community, thereby contributing to isolation that collaborative reforms were initiated to address. Thus, Achinstein contends that the success of a learning community may depend on the readiness of all stakeholders to acknowledge the conflicts and tension inherent in collaboration, and the willingness and commitment of the participants to overcome these potential barriers. She found that how a community navigated their differences resulted in contrasting potentials for organizational learning and change in schools.

Much of any conflict experienced within PLCs may be rooted in the varied ideologies held by teachers. Ideology defines the framework of shared values about education, schooling, and students. It includes an orientation of student learning and outcomes, notions about how schools should reform and change, conceptions about the relationships between schools and society, and about basic values and goals about integration, tracking, segregation, and desegregation (Achinstein, 2002). While stability and coherence may be experienced if members share similar ideologies, considerable conflict can occur if teachers within a learning community differ in their beliefs, or if the internal ideologies of

those in a PLC are in marked conflict with those held by the majority of the profession who are external to the group.

Despite the varied positions of researchers, all appear to agree on two key points: the process of developing a collaborative culture in schools is very complex, and the US teaching profession has not yet developed a strong tradition of professional collaboration (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009).

Review of NSDC Report

In affiliation with Stanford University, the National Staff Development Council released a comprehensive report (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009) identifying what research has revealed about providing professional learning opportunities for educators that improve teachers' practices and promote student learning. Key findings of this report include that efforts to improve student learning succeed, "only by building the capacity of teachers to improve their instructional practices and the capacity of the school systems to promote teacher learning" (Darling-Hammond et al., p. 7). Strategies found to support teacher learning include mentoring programs and school-based coaching programs. But the report reveals that the most important factor in ensuring the success of schools (as measured by student achievement scores) is in providing opportunities for teachers to engage in effective, school-wide and collaborative, professional learning. Citing several national studies that discuss what distinguishes high-performing, high-poverty schools from their lower-performing counterparts, the report consistently identifies sustained and intensive professional learning for

teachers as critical to the success of schools in ensuring gains in student achievement.

The report indicates that both the content and the process for collaboration professional learning are important. Notably, the report reveals that teachers typically need close to 50 hours in any given area to expand their skills and improve students' learning. According to this research, intensive professional development efforts that offer an average of 49 hours in a year boost student achievement by approximately 21 percentile points. Other efforts that involved a limited amount of professional development (ranging from 5 to 14 hours in total) showed no statistically significant effect on student learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009, p. 9).

While teachers in the US typically participate in short-term professional development and workshops as frequently as teachers in other nations, the kind of job-embedded, collaborative learning that is most effective in increasing student achievement is not common across schools in the US, largely because US teachers have far fewer opportunities for extended learning or collaboration. The study revealed that when compared to nations that outperform the US on international assessments, "US teachers spend about 80 percent of their total working time engaged in classroom instruction, as compared to about 60 percent for these other nations' teachers" (Darling-Hammond et al., p. 6). These nations build in time for ongoing, sustained teacher development and collaboration into teachers' regular work hours. Further, comparatively, teachers in the US have far

less influence in crucial areas of school-based decisions, especially curriculum and assessment, and in the design of their own learning, than their counterparts.

Research has consistently shown that teachers in the United States demonstrate an individualist ethos, largely due to the way schools have been organized. Cultural norms of isolationism are not easily changed, especially if school structures and working conditions perpetuate privacy. Thus, the report calls for schools to create and embed time for teachers to foster productive, collaborative relationships within content areas or departments to ensure that collaborative professional development is ongoing and connected to practice. The report advises that schools create a shared sense of intellectual purpose and a sense of collective responsibility for student learning in an effort to deepen teachers' knowledge, build their skills, improve their instruction, and narrow student achievement gaps.

Situating PLCs Within the Accountability Era

Data accumulation and analysis to ensure “accountability” are key components of federal and state education policies today, and they have become routine parts of teaching and learning. In an educational climate that is increasingly directed by the demands of accountability and an overreliance on test scores, the viability of PLCs will likely be determined by their success in enhancing student achievement (Vescio et al., 2008). Regardless of how teachers or researchers feel about the purpose of schools or the various means one might use to measure student learning and development, ultimately educators are

expected to critically examine the results of their efforts in terms of student achievement on a variety of assessments. To demonstrate results, PLCs will be required to articulate their outcomes in terms of data that indicate changed teaching practices and improved student learning, something that some researchers have warned that they have not yet established as common practice (Vescio et al., 2008).

Some studies are beginning to cite accountability pressures as obstacles to effective teacher communities (Vescio et al., 2008; Stoll et al., 2006; Piazza et al., 2009). These researchers assert that the work of teachers in PLCs is complicated by the need to demonstrate ongoing, short-term instrumental gains, and that the demand to achieve such short term gains may inhibit the creation of effective and autonomous teacher communities. Thus, the focus on external pressures may negatively impact the dynamics of the learning community (Piazza et al., 2009).

Summary

Most advocates for professional development recommend that teachers work together, collaboratively, to improve their teaching practices, provide the best educational experiences for all learners, and increase student achievement. To better understand why this is so, this review of the literature included a discussion of the history of professional development and how collaborative forms of professional development have evolved, and a review of reform initiatives involving collegiality or collaboration. This chapter provided an overview of the varied models of PLCs rooted in the practices of collaboration

and collegiality, and a report of what early research has indicated about teachers' participation in PLCs. Further, a summary of the findings of the NSDC report recommending that teachers in the United States be afforded more opportunities to participate in collaborative forms of professional development was shared, along with a brief discussion about how the success of PLCs in the future will likely be contingent on the scores of students of teachers participating in PLCs.

A review of the literature reveals both the benefits and complexities of establishing collaborative forms of professional development in schools situated in the current era of accountability. Some researchers caution that the most recent policies and practices inherent in reform initiatives today may serve to disempower teachers and further dismantle public education. As many advocates for school reform continue to call for more opportunities for teachers to participate in collaborative forms of professional development, research that examines how teachers are responding to the practice of regularly sharing evidence of students' results, situated within the current context, could not be more timely. It is my hope that the responses of teachers in GSD revealed throughout the remainder of this dissertation will promote a better understanding of the experiences of teachers working collaboratively to meet the demands of teaching and learning, and serve to stimulate discussion about the meaning teachers attach to those behaviors and events throughout their work. As a result, teachers may have a better understanding of the fundamental challenges, issues, and practices within the context of the current era of accountability that might

promote or impede the exchange of ideas and practices amongst them as they are expected to work collaboratively within professional learning communities.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

Shulman (1997) has contended that doing good research is not a matter of finding one best method. Rather, good research requires that researchers first frame a question that is important to the investigator and the field, and then select and effectively employ an appropriate approach to the inquiry. Establishing the intended purpose for an inquiry and understanding one's affiliation with ways of knowing are essential steps for researchers when determining the best method to employ to pursue an inquiry. Both the intended purpose and a researcher's affiliation with ways of knowing will influence every element of the research process including the ways in which they will gather data, how they might go about analyzing their findings, and by what standards the research will be judged (Morrow and Smith, 2000).

This chapter includes a justification of the methods selected to accomplish the intended purposes of this inquiry. A description of Green School District is included, and the participants of this study are introduced, albeit vaguely, in an attempt to respectfully deal with the ethics of the study. Next, I explain the data collection process and the means in which data was analyzed for this inquiry, revealing the typology employed to categorize the responses of teachers. I examine the issues of reliability, validity and generalization as those standards apply to traditional research, and recommend the standards for which to evaluate

this inquiry. Finally, I reveal how I situated myself as the researcher, and logistics of the study are considered in the latter part of the chapter.

Justification of Methods

This study was not undertaken with the intent of coming to definitive answers about how teachers are responding to the practice and expectation of sharing students' results as they work in professional learning communities. Nor was it ever a goal to claim with certainty what impact this context might be having on teachers, their teaching practices, their relationships with their colleagues or the culture of their schools. Rather, from the very start I pursued this inquiry to try to raise important questions about the varied experiences of teachers working within the era of accountability, to stimulate discussions about the meanings behind these experiences, and to deepen the conversations about certain fundamental issues in education today. Accomplishing this called for a methodological approach that has, in the past, been considered innovative. This research has been labeled ethnography (Wolcott, 1997), situated within what Erickson (1986) identified as qualitative or interpretive research. Justification of my choice of this approach requires a brief discussion regarding the different ways of inquiring and knowing and an explanation of how ethnographers pursue said inquiries and ways of knowing.

Richard Rorty (1980) asserted that there are two main purposes of human inquiry – the enhancement of certainty and the enhancement of meaning. According to Bruner (1986), the enhancement of certainty is ideally attained

through empirically driven experiments that seek to arrive at definitive conclusions. In contrast, inquiry with the purpose of enhancing meaning seeks to unveil or discover multiple meanings within texts, research, subjects or stories.

Generally, educational inquiries tend to be divided into two categories: those that are quantitative and those that are qualitative. Both may generate useful knowledge, but they can differ in purpose, methods employed, and the presence of truth claims. According to Shulman (1997), quantitative methods typically involve relatively large and carefully selected samples of individuals in ways that attempt to maximize the generalizability of the findings. In contrast, qualitative researchers often study unusual settings “to portray the workings of circumstances that differ dramatically from what typically presents itself in the ‘natural’ functioning of our society” (Shulman, 1997, p. 18). Researchers engaged in qualitative inquiry often commit to demonstrating the viability of alternative educational approaches. Qualitative studies in education are often conducted through case studies or ethnographic methods.

Educational ethnographers pursue inquiries that seek to enhance meaning. According to Wolcott (1997), ethnography is well suited to answer the question, “What is going on here?” It is not appropriate to answer questions that are pressing to most educators, including “What should we be doing?” According to Erickson (1986), ethnographers pay attention to emic issues, those that involve the concerns and values in the behavior and language of the people being studied. Thus, ethnographers attend to broad cultural context as they examine behaviors,

events, and the meanings persons assign to those behaviors and events throughout their work. As a result, ethnographers are comfortable with the idea of increasing the complexity of a setting or problem being addressed, as opposed to decreasing it (Wolcott, 1997).

The primary instrument for collecting data in qualitative inquiries is the researcher. The primary data source for the purposes of this research was obtained from interviews with participating teachers to try to understand the meanings they construct about their work and how they are making sense of their experiences. These interviews convey the happenings of teachers' collaborative work together, expressed in their own words, rendering a picture about the place we are in education at this time.

Description of District

Located in a metro area in the southwest region of the United States, Green School District (not the district's real name) employees about 1600 certified teachers and serves about 26,000 students. A K-12 district, Green School District struggles with many of the same issues and challenges found in other large metropolises across the country, including: extreme budget cuts to public education to try to reduce looming state deficits, disparities in equity and resources amongst schools within the district, rapidly changing demographics in some schools as a result of ongoing immigration, retaining high quality teachers to best meet the needs of diverse populations of students, closing the achievement gap between students identified as economically advantaged and disadvantaged,

developing culturally responsive and respectful teaching and learning experiences for all students, and providing resources and support for students whose first language is not English (Wood, 2007). In response to these challenges, Green School District established a focus and vision that was universally recognized and understood by all stakeholders during the 2007-08, 2008-09 and 2009-10 school years. Green School District aimed to maintain the notoriety of having no schools identified as “failing” within the District, and to preserve the distinction of having one of the highest percentages of schools labeled as “excelling” in the region.

To allow its teachers, principals and schools to be most successful in addressing the challenges inherent in teaching and learning in public schools, beginning in 2007 Green School District changed the way it had previously organized professional development for teachers. Based on the recommendations of the National Staff Development Council, GSD embarked on a three year journey to establish professional learning communities in all 30 plus schools. The 2009-10 school year was the third year of implementation of this plan, and all teachers participated in the Dufour et al. model of PLCs from the start of the 09-10 school year. Throughout the data collection of this study, teachers across the District were expected to meet regularly and engage in an ongoing process of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better “results” for student learning. Though it was not my intent to study specific features or the effectiveness of professional learning communities, this form of job-embedded

professional development is the vehicle in which the collaborative experiences and exchanges of these teachers are embedded.

Participants and Data Collection

Central to this inquiry are the responses of teachers to questions posed about their experiences participating in PLCs in GSD. As is the case in many qualitative inquiries, the selection of participants or subjects has not been random with respect to this inquiry. I collected responses from teachers working within GSD, the district in which I am currently employed. I interviewed teachers during the first semester of the 2009-10 school year, from August 1, 2009, to January 1, 2010, to reveal a wide array of experiences. Though at one point I considered limiting this inquiry to include the experiences of teachers from schools in this District that did not make Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) the previous year, it was my feeling that by doing so, I could not ensure the anonymity of my participants. Thus, I chose to interview participants from across the District. I conducted initial, semi-structured interviews with fifteen teachers at the elementary, middle and high school levels representing a range of socio-economic contexts across GSD. I interviewed five teachers from elementary or K-8 schools, five from the middle level, and five teaching at the high school level. Six of these participants were working in schools with large populations of students considered economically advantaged and nine were teaching in schools where students were largely considered economically disadvantaged. Two of these nine teachers had previous experience in working in schools that were

considered economically advantaged in GSD. None of the participating teachers were “new” teachers and most would clearly be characterized as “veterans” – most with more than fifteen years of experience working as educators in public schools. All but two of the participants allowed me to tape the initial interview, and the other two requested that I script the comments they shared during their interviews.

Spradley (1979) reminded researchers of the importance of allaying the apprehensiveness of informants in order to elicit information during interviews. To accomplish this, I tried to be transparent and shared the purpose of my inquiry when interviewing teachers, and I ensured their anonymity as informants. (Please see Appendix A for the introductory letter given to participants, approved by both the ASU IRB and District level administrators in GSD.)

To encourage my informants to reflect and say as much as they could about their collaborative experiences situated within the context of the accountability era, I employed the use of typical or specific grand tour questions (Spradley, 1979), followed up with mini-tour, example or experience questions as I believed were warranted. After transcribing the interviews, I distributed hard copies to all participants and allowed them to clarify their responses and make any revisions or additions that they believed important. This served as a way to conduct member checks to ensure the accuracy of teachers’ responses.

Erickson (1986) recognized the importance of context within qualitative research, and he understood that participants’ actions and meanings are context

dependent. He recommended that qualitative researchers use multiple means of gathering data in order to make sense of the context of participants and the complexity inherent in any social interactions. Though the audiotapes of the informal, semi-structured interviews with teachers have served as the primary sources of data throughout this inquiry, other data to support this inquiry included: spontaneous encounters with teachers, principals, teachers on assignment and district officials across GSD (both verbally and via email), products or evidence of student learning that teachers shared when collaborating (including benchmark scores, AIMS scores, samples of student work, etc.), any tools or protocols employed by teachers when meeting with their colleagues (intended to guide their collaborative exchanges), and any directives or tools given by principals or district officials that specified when or how teachers were expected to collaborate (verbally or via email).

Data Analysis and Typology

Data analysis within ethnographic studies usually involves the coding and grouping of the data or material into various categories. To support the analysis required in this inquiry, I borrowed a typology modified by Barone (2008). Barone identified the following styles of teachers' responses to external mandates: complying, embracing, coping, subverting, negotiating, collective resistance, and escaping. I coded and categorized the data (in the form of transcriptions) according to the styles of teachers' responses to the demands of working collaboratively in PLCs. Employing this typology allowed me to make sense of

the data and begin the process of theorizing as important ideas and themes within the categories began to emerge among the responses of the participants.

In keeping with Barth (2006), during the data analysis I looked for evidence of what might be understood as cooperative or competitive school cultures within the responses of participating teachers. I considered those events that perpetuated cooperative or competitive cultures throughout the inquiry to get a deeper understanding of what is happening as teachers participate in this form of professional development and reform within the current context. As is explained by Behrens and Smith (1996), my analysis of the data required ongoing, reflective thinking during the collection of the responses, and subsequently, during the reflection, analysis and when writing the research.

Wolcott (1997) reminds researchers that the process by which ethnographer's transform the data from the fieldwork experiences is what allows material to take the shape of an ethnographic study. Thus, it is in the write up that materials become ethnographic as researchers first describe what is going on among a particular group and then provide a cultural interpretation of how the participants make meaning or sense of those behaviors.

To describe the experiences of teachers with as much detail as possible, I included excerpts from the interviews with participants as I wrote Chapter Four. Later, I would further analyze the data, including additional excerpts from teachers and employing the lenses of critical theorists in Chapter Five. As Wolcott (1997) explains, I purposefully selected excerpts that connected with

both of the purposes of this inquiry with the hope that understanding what things mean to teachers might conceivably make a difference to them, and their work.

From Validity and Generalization to Critical Utility

Many forms of research use the criteria of validity, reliability, and generalizability as indicators to judge the merit of their worth. But issues of validity, reliability and generalizability differ, depending on the researcher's affiliation with a paradigm and with respect to the purpose(s) for the research. Researchers engaged in qualitative inquiry often establish their own standards for reliability, validity, generalizability, or offer alternative ways persons might evaluate the goodness of the research.

Before I propose the standards for which to evaluate this inquiry, it is important to understand generalizability, reliability and validity as they have been defined within different research paradigms. In traditional research, validity is understood to represent the degree to which that which is described does so, accurately; reliability concerns whether or not something described can be duplicated or replicated. According to Shulman (1997), generalizability is an issue for all forms of inquiry. He defined generalizability as the degree to which a scholar might make a knowledge claim that his or her work can be used to support other, "like" claims.

Some qualitative researchers do not aspire to create work that is generalizable, reliable or valid, as those standards have been previously applied to traditional research. Addressing the questions held by some scholars regarding

the dependability of knowledge without a measure of validity, Barone and Eisner (1997) assert the following:

The primary aim of all research is to further human understanding. The aim of educational research is to further human understanding so the quality of educational practice can be improved. The achievement of such an aim, in turn, increases the probability that students will be able to lead an enhanced quality of life. In short, educational research serves its most important function when it enhances people's lives. Given this view, validity is related to the instrumental utility of the research that was undertaken to achieve such aims. (Barone & Eisner, 1997, p. 85)

Barone (2000) used the term "critical utility" to describe the degree to which an inquiry might serve as a catalyst for persons to think more critically about certain issues. Thus, I propose that this inquiry be evaluated based on the constructs of instrumental and critical utilities, not on the constructs of validity or reliability as those have been previously used in traditional research.

I will be satisfied if this research stimulates discussion about fundamental challenges and concerns associated with the practice of comparing students' results situated within the accountability measures mandated in the policies in education today. I purposefully tried to craft this inquiry so that it might be accessible to teachers as the intended audience, persuading them to rethink or reconsider practices that may very well be accepted as commonplace or familiar within educational settings. It is my hope that this inquiry will prompt readers to see education and "students' results" in new ways, so that ultimately, the experiences of students and teachers can be improved. In this way, the study will have achieved a degree of utility.

Situating the Researcher

The collective community of qualitative researchers generally embraces the idea that conducting value-free, interpretive research is not achievable, and that researcher subjectivity is inevitable. Erickson (1986) recognized that perfect objectivity is not possible. He recommended that researchers reveal how they go about making any decisions during the study, how they have justified any claims that they made, and which information to prioritize. Stake (1997) maintained that even decisions about what to exclude involve subjectivity on the part of the researcher, and need to be revealed. Kilbourn (1999) concurred, advocating for the use of what he coined the “self-conscious method,” a process in which researchers make visible the decisions he/she made, especially regarding the methods employed, during the research investigation. Accordingly, I exercised the self-conscious method and continuously reflected about how I decided which excerpts from interviews to include, and which to exclude, throughout the inquiry.

Cultural and critical theorists remind researchers of the complexity inherent in any social interactions and that interviews and stories collected during fieldwork are, themselves, value-ridden. They remind researchers to be mindful of the way in which they reveal cases or stories to ensure that they are not disempowering the very voices they hope to empower. Hence, throughout this inquiry I engaged in an ongoing process of reflection, considering the dominant messages within the excerpts collected and the hegemony that may be at work on persons’ story-lines and perspectives.

Though I represented the voices and perspectives of the teachers in this inquiry as accurately as possible, my vantage point as a researcher has been privileged as I assessed the significance of the experiences and decided which parts of interviews to include to provide a vivid account of how teachers are responding to measures of accountability, and those that had the greatest potential to stimulate discussion and engender questions about fundamental issues in education today.

Finally, it is important to explain that after the data collection part of this inquiry, I was promoted to a position that involves the responsibility of coordinating the professional development and curriculum initiatives in GSD. As a result, as a researcher I found myself selecting some responses that were not necessarily important to the research question, but that might perpetuate a better understanding of what teachers in GSD are experiencing to allow me to better meet their needs and support them from the new position I have in this District. I recognize that some of the excerpts from participating teachers are likely longer than necessary, but I felt a responsibility to include them to allow those affiliated with my new position to get a broader picture of what teachers in GSD are experiencing.

Logistics

McLaughlin and Talbert (1993) have noted that schools differ strikingly from one another in the strength of their professional learning communities, reporting clear differences even within the same districts in levels of collegiality,

faculty innovativeness, and learning opportunities as perceived by teachers. This can be said of the experiences of teachers across Green School District, too.

Though I pursued this inquiry within a district that was in the process of establishing PLCs based on the Dufour et al. model, it is important to reveal that interpretations of this model differed significantly across this district based on many variables, including how teachers and principals perceived what they were being asked to do, and the values, platforms, and ideologies of teachers. Even with support and training about what this model looks like, how and what teachers did in PLCs, and the collaborative exchanges within them, varied considerably across this district, between grade levels and content areas, and even within teams from the same school.

Spradley (1979) established the importance and need for researchers to develop rapport and trust with participants to ensure the success of interviews. Working as a professional development support specialist, I had the unique opportunity to develop significant levels of rapport and trust with teachers and administrators across Green School District. Because of this rapport and trust and as a result of the relationships I have established with many of the teachers I worked to support, access to participants was not a problem. To the contrary, some teachers came forward and volunteered to share their experiences. Every teacher I approached agreed to participate in the inquiry.

The selection of this District to pursue this inquiry raises several questions worthy of discussion. My positions within GSD posed both unique opportunities

and challenges to the inquiry. While I was fortunate to have access to the experiences of hundreds of teachers working within the District, I have remained cognizant of the responsibility I had, and continue to have, as a professional development support specialist. In this role, my responsibilities included working with teams of teachers to help them learn more about collaboration and the PLC initiative. I consciously chose participants with whom I had relationships established prior to this study, but with whom I had limited involvement in facilitating their learning about professional learning communities.

Though I appreciated the level of candidness on the part of the participants of my study, I anticipated that the experiences and responses collected would be even more revealing, unveiling further effects or consequences that ensue when teachers compare evidence of students' results. I believe at least some of the participants may have been a little bit guarded in their responses during the interviews, given my position as a professional development specialist was situated as a "District level" position. Further, participants became aware of the implications of SB1040 and the elimination of tenure as a factor in teacher evaluation and retention in Arizona during the data collection of this inquiry, and this may have prompted them to hold back a bit during the interviews, given that all or parts of their responses might be published within this dissertation.

More significantly, *I* became aware of the implications of the elimination of tenure and of SB 1040 and as a result, felt an overwhelming sense of responsibility to protect the trust and identity of the participants in the inquiry.

Though I had originally planned to provide more information about the participants, I did not feel I could do so in a way that would ensure their anonymity. Thus, I reworked how I represented and organized the excerpts within Chapter Four, fracturing the responses a bit in the typology so as to protect the identity of the participants. I opted to not share responses in full, but instead used excerpts from the interviews as a means of fictionalizing. Though I can defend this decision as a way to deal with the ethics of the study, fracturing the interviews and responses likely made for a less cohesive Chapter Four, and one more difficult to write.

Also significant with respect to the logistics that impacted this inquiry is the fact that throughout the course of this inquiry, the second purpose of the study continued to emerge as equally important to discuss. I found it very difficult to separate the experiences of teachers comparing students' results while working collaboratively within their PLCs from the context in which their PLCs were embedded. As a result, I began to afford equal attention to the second purpose of the study during the interviews, as the responses teachers shared brought to light larger concerns of teaching and learning in the era of accountability.

Consequently, I found myself recalibrating the study again and again to try to allow for the implications associated with the second purpose to emerge.

Discussing how teachers are responding to the practice of sharing and comparing evidence of students' results was no longer the only story that warranted telling.

Throughout the inquiry I observed that the much larger frame of accountability

measures inherent in reform initiatives today may have more to do with how teachers are responding to this particular practice of comparing results, than the practice, itself. This proved problematic when trying to keep the focus of the dissertation narrow enough to remain manageable and clear.

Summary

In this chapter I explained the methods employed to accomplish the purposes of the inquiry. The chapter included a description of Green School District, and the means of selecting participants and collecting data were discussed. I examined the issues of reliability, validity and generalization as those standards apply to traditional research and recommended the standards for which to evaluate this inquiry. I disclosed how I situated myself as the researcher, and logistics of the study were considered. This chapter also introduced the typology used to categorize the responses of teachers and begin the analysis of this inquiry, both of which occur in Chapters Four and Five.

CHAPTER 4

TEACHERS' RESPONSES TO EXTERNAL MANDATES REGARDING STANDARDIZATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY: A TYPOLOGY

This chapter offers a glimpse into the professional experiences of 15 teachers in Green School District as they participate in PLCs, navigating their way through the practices and demands inherent in the current era of standardization and accountability. In this chapter I have privileged the voices of these teachers, including excerpts from the transcripts of their responses in the form of vignettes. With minimal editing, I have woven the excerpts together to try to depict an accurate account of the varied experiences of these teachers as they respond to the demands of working together collaboratively, regularly sharing evidence of students' learning and results within the context of their required participation in a professional learning community.

The responses of participating teachers are organized by a typology modified by Barone (2008) in this chapter. This typology served to categorize themes that emerged from the experiences teachers shared during the interviews. Barone identified seven styles of teachers' responses to external mandates, explained in Table 1.

As I coded and clustered the transcriptions into these categories, several themes emerged among the experiences of the participants. These themes depict the variance and complexity of the lived experiences of teachers as they work together collaboratively within the demands of the accountability era. In keeping

with qualitative research, I have tried to capture these responses in the remainder of this chapter, using subheadings within the typology to allow important ideas within the categories to emerge.

Table 1

Typology Employed to Categorize Responses

Complying	Teachers passively accept mandate, practice or policy – with no critical reflection
Embracing	Teachers embrace mandate/policy -- given it supports teachers' beliefs, values, or educational philosophies
Coping	Teachers comply with some or all of the mandate, even though they recognize the mandate is antithetical to their philosophical position or platform
Subverting	Teachers believe that a mandate is educationally harmful, or they don't agree with a decision made by other members of their group – so they choose to ignore or dismiss the mandate or the decisions of their group
Negotiating	Teachers bargain with those in control (site or district level administrators) for compromise with the mandate, practice or policy
Collective resistance	Teachers refuse to comply with mandate and crusade with allies against the mandate or against those proposing the mandate
Escaping	Teachers “escape” by leaving a team of teachers, a position, a school or by leaving the profession, altogether

Complying

Compliance implies that teachers inertly accept a mandate, practice or expectation, with no critical reflection. Responses categorized as compliant signify that teachers fulfill the expectations of the mandate – in this case, being expected to work together in collaborative teams that share and compare evidence of student learning as is clearly delineated in the Dufour et al. model of a PLC and was expected across GSD.

The lack of funding for public education and the resulting RIFs in Green School District have had an impact on some teachers' attitudes about their positions. As a result, some teachers shared that they were willing to comply and do whatever asked of them without questioning or critical reflection.

[Teacher 10] Some teachers are just so happy to have a job that they are going to do whatever it takes... to get that job done.

Another teacher indicated that some teachers are willing to comply by jumping through a host of hoops without reflecting, simple because they love their jobs.

[Teacher 13] Because I think... teachers love their jobs. Every teacher loves their job. And if they don't love their job... then they are typically not in it for all that long. So you do whatever you can to try to keep that position. And if it means jumping through hoops... and doing something that has been passed down from the District and from the Feds. Then so be it. You know... you can still create some of those [other] nuances that enable you to be the teacher that you truly want to be.

This same teacher explained that members of his PLC were compliant, doing the work as was expected by his administrator, "Straight out of Dufour:"

[Karen] [What do] you guys do when you meet in PLCs?

[Teacher 13]... We talk about ways to measure [student learning]... once we establish our instrument... we move towards some of those practices that work best for each individual. We are going to come up with some common lessons, and see what works out in those regards. And then look to see from the remedial aspect... those students that still aren't getting it... what can we do? Just straight out of Dufour...

Other responses from teachers indicate that they comply with the expectation of creating opportunities for remediation, intervention, or enrichment for students based on students' results on common assessments or state assessments from the previous year. Some acknowledge that the opportunities they are creating for these purposes may afford students with different learning opportunities altogether which, in some cases, resembles tracking:

[Karen] And how do we determine who gets remediation and enrichment?

[Teacher 5] Largely that determination is made... well, largely students are placed in remediation classes based on [their state test] scores from the previous year.

Adds another:

[Karen] How much do you think student choice plays into all of this? What they want to learn about?

[Teacher 6] There's no choice!? No! No, No...

Well here's a recent example of some choice [in GSD]. My son's teacher [in this District] is amazing... they were learning about topographical stuff... and different parts of the country. She let some of the kids choose... those that had already met the benchmarks if you will... you can do this, this or this. They got to pick. She gave them three choices.

So he chose to learn about Mount Rushmore... he knew how to use a topographic map and what a tundra region was and all that... so he got to do something else.

[Karen] What did the kids do that didn't do well on the benchmark... that didn't meet... what did they get to do?

[Teacher 6] They had to keep remediating whatever skills they were doing.

Adds another, beginning to reflect on the tracking going on at her school near the end of the excerpt:

[Teacher 1] We don't track... of course we don't track.

But we have the [specialized] program which is C track... and then we have the regular track... which is, you know, B track. And then we have the honors track, which is A track. So [I guess maybe] we do have tracking.

Embracing

Like many other districts across the country, Green School District has endorsed the idea of PLCs, and District leaders encourage and expect the teachers of GSD to engage in collaborative, collective learning to improve their teaching and promote gains in student achievement. At the very heart of the PLC concept is the notion of “community,” rooted in a collegial and collaborative school culture that fosters growth and cooperation as teachers talk about their instructional practices and share their craft with one another. Many teachers in Green School District recognize the value in the practice of collaboration and the hope that PLCs might be an effective school reform initiative. Other teachers shared that working together is simply the right thing to do to meet the challenges inherent in teaching today. Thus, teachers' responses categorized as embracing indicate that teachers have reflected on the expectations of working together and

that they desire to fulfill the expectations, endorsing the practices of “standardization” and sharing students’ results as they are consistent with their educational philosophy.

[Teacher 4] The idea of the PLC is certainly going to help foster collaboration. And it’s long overdue. I’ve never been as excited about an educational approach. I absolutely believe this can work.

Adds another:

[Karen] When you see teachers collaborating, what are they collaborating about?

[Teacher 2] They are getting together and talking about specific needs of children... and talking about solutions. They are really solutions-oriented. You know... oh try this, try that. Sharing either whether it’s behavior modification plans or talking about common assessments... authentic assessments. I think the dialogues are changing.

And another:

[Teacher 5] Some of the PLCs on our campus that I'm hearing from my colleagues... they are just working really well. Everybody is sharing ideas. Everybody is working well together. It's very collaborative. It's very solutions-focused. “What are we going to do? Here is what we want to accomplish... and here’s what we are going to do to do it.”

And still others:

[Karen] Do you share your stuff?

[Teacher 1] If we [didn’t] share stuff it’s because we really [didn’t] have the opportunity. But now through the PLCs we are having more of an opportunity and we share stuff like crazy.

[Teacher 10] I need to be able to [say], “Oh, what are you doing that’s good? Can I have that? Can I work on that with my kids?” Especially now with this new technology... we need to help each other with this new technology and all of this new, fun stuff that is out there. So we’re all very willing to share and show each other... and come in after school... and, “Let me show [you] how to do this.”

And another:

[Teacher 12] Well I will have to say that the accountability movement has pushed us closer together... in terms of what we do [in our PLC].

[Karen] Because?

[Teacher 12] Umm... well one is a management directive. You will meet... you will talk... and that's ok. If that's what it takes to get it done... that's ok. And the other part of it is very altruistic. It is the right thing to do.

Some teachers in GSD shared that they embrace the practice of regularly looking at student data in the form of quarterly benchmark results or quantifiable data from annual, standardized tests, both recommended by the Dufour et al. model. Several teachers explained (and endorsed) that the entire master schedule at their school is based on last year's benchmark and state test scores, as students are "ability grouped" or scheduled for intervention blocks, based on those scores. One teacher indicated that school cultures are changing to routinely include dialogues about students' data, and that teachers simply need to reframe any anxieties when looking at student scores, dismissing the connection between student scores as indicators of teacher performance:

[Teacher 6] I've drunk the Kool Aid. I look at benchmark and [state standardized test] data all the time.

When [we] are talking about student data, because now we are in the culture of having to share that... [Teachers] really do have to reframe their fear when [they] are saying, "Well...I don't want my data out there." I'm having to say, "It's not your data... it's students' data. It assesses your students. It doesn't assess you as a teacher."

And even though we are a year and a half into it... [I find myself saying]... "It's not about you." And having to really be... as non-nurturing as that sounds. "It is not about you... it's about student

achievement... and how we get there... the road map on which we are following.”

Adds another, emphasizing the value and importance of attending a “Dufour conference” to learn more about how to work in professional learning communities:

[Karen] The expectation is that people are meeting in PLCs. Do you see that as working?

[Teacher 4] Those of us who attended the Dufours’ conference are wildly enthusiastic. We can back from the conference asking, “How can we get started, and when?” For most teachers, the opportunity to attend the conference was non-existent. For them [participation in PLCs] is contrived.

... it’s hard. I’m convinced that we can get there. We absolutely need to get teachers to do book studies, view on-line conferences, educate, educate, educate. It’s the best solution I’ve seen to problems that exist in our schools. I hope it flies...

...Dufour is right when he suggests that someone else might be able to teach a unit better than me. If a student doesn’t understand the way I teach a unit, what’s wrong with turning the student over to someone else?

[Karen] How long have you been an educator?

[Teacher 4] This is my 40th year.

[Karen] So, you’ve seen professional development reform initiatives come and go... and varied levels of accountability. What are you seeing now with respect to accountability... and how teachers are responding to what that means?

[Teacher 4] Several thoughts come to mind. First of all, I have seen so many different initiatives come and go. In fact, that’s been the one constant... they come, they go.

...Now education is all about teaching to standards. As far as standards are concerned... insofar as accountability is concerned, I would say that currently we are in a “go” stage. Students take a high stakes test, the majority of them pass – after all, they need only achieve the minimum

standard – and we move on. Hopefully, PLCs will be the answer we need and we will get the support and the time to set meaningful standards adapted to our own needs. Wouldn't that be something?

Finally, while first citing the unfairness of the schools of choice and the varied readiness levels of the students within those schools of choice in GSD, one teacher indicated he embraces the demands of the accountability era, situating them as a fun challenge:

[Teacher 15] The game's not fair. Some schools choose their "community" of learners [the schools of choice within the district]. But on the flip side... I love accountability.

[Karen] Tell me why you love it.

[Teacher 15] You always hear that accountability has taken away the fun. But I am totally having fun. I totally get to be creative. Yes, in ways we teach to the test. But we have to do it in a fun way because we have to get them to understand it... and remember it.

Coping

The bulk of teachers' responses and experiences at GSD involve coping strategies employed by teachers as they feel obligated to comply with the mandated expectations of working together in their PLCs, though they fully understand that the mandates are in conflict with their philosophical beliefs, educational platforms or positions about teaching and learning. Coping is different than embracing and complying in that teachers are aware that they disagree with the mandate or practice, yet they conform and fulfill the expectations of the mandate, with no evidence of resistance. There are several subsets to this category of coping, each showing how teachers are passively

responding by coping to some dimension of the mandated practices and measures of accountability when working in PLCs.

Coping with Expectations from Those Imposing Mandates

Several of the teachers from GSD identified layers of pressure and expectations from a variety of sources at work in the era of accountability. Some teachers equated the layers of accountability to “enemies,” and their experiences with their colleagues to those of being a prisoner of war or an abused child:

[Teacher 8] For me... I see teachers more involved. But it's almost like being a prisoner of war where you buddy with the person next to you because you know the enemy is there... so this is my colleague.

[Karen] What is the enemy?

[Teacher 8] Um... the enemy is either the principal if [he/she] is a manager and not a leader. The District... because they get the directions... Or it's the State... Or it's the Federal Government. And you know... everybody... get in line. You get kicked by everyone.

[Karen] Layers of enemy?

[Teacher 8] Layers. But I think that the ironic outcome of that is that teachers are feeling more of a connection with each other. It's almost like abused kids that get closer to their brother and sister because they are being abused so much.

Adds another:

[Karen] Let's talk about PLCs. What's happening? Do you like them?

[Teacher 15] Nope.

[Karen] Because...?

[Teacher 15] Because in middle school it's very difficult for it to work when you have [little opportunity to meet with like-content-area

colleagues]... Again it's a flawed process. We're being told to do this. It's shoved in our face.

It's almost like a punishment.. I feel like a middle school student. "We need those goals!" It's not anything friendly. And when we get together we all look around and say... "What are we supposed to do?"

In theory... I love it. I feel like we used to do this. [But now]... We meet by department... not by grade level/content area.

[Karen] Do you do common assessments?

[Teacher 15] [Yes... but] the common assessment our PLC wrote is so bad. Seriously... we laughed at how bad it was... But that's what our administrator wanted.

We did look at our AIMS scores and this is true... good data. We noticed that we were lower in number sense on AIMS... so we worked on that as a department.

But for our PLC we had to come up with questions we could use in all classes. So we came up with 5 questions based on our administrator's expectations... and we said... "Ok, we'll do that."

[Karen] How could it be different?

[Teacher 15] You could actually be trusted as a teacher. Like the example of number sense. You go above... and teach it differently and make it work. You don't have to have the exact same piece of paper to make it work. You just reword everything.

Coping with Competition and Comparison of Students' Scores

Using PLCs as the pathway to promote school improvement encourages that administrators structure opportunities for teachers to work together, collaboratively, to share their teaching strategies, improve their teaching practices and increase student learning. Much of the literature about PLCs depicts a harmonious picture of these collaborative experiences of teachers. But as Stoll

and Fink (1996) have indicated, the collaborative experiences of teachers are context dependent and can differ significantly between schools that are deemed excelling and those that are struggling to earn or maintain a non-failing label.

Teachers in GSD note the differences in pressures experienced by those teaching in Title I schools as compared to those teaching in schools with less diversity in their population. Further, many of the teachers cite different levels of pressure and responsibility amongst teachers within the same building – explaining that those that teach the content areas measured on state standardized tests are under far greater pressure, and those that teach other content areas are left feeling as if their content area, and their work, is largely unimportant and irrelevant.

[Teacher 10] I think that just working in a Title I school... is more pressure... more work... more effort.

[Teacher 5] Just overall the whole accountability umbrella has just put so much pressure on teachers... The constant belief that [your students] are going to fail test scores... and your kids didn't do as well as so-and-so's and why didn't your kids do as well?

Adds another:

[Teacher 1] [I hear other teachers] complaining about having a kid in a [high school] class that reads at a 5th grade level. OK. And my response to that is, “Hey, when I got them, they were reading at a 2nd grade level. You know. I might be a missionary... but I am not a miracle worker. If I can get them up to 5th grade level... then it is up to you to work in a classroom with kids reading at a 5th grade level all the way up to post college level.” Because that is what you are going to have [in a Title I school].

Where I am competitive I guess... My worry, which is driving my competitiveness is... I don't want a kid to be sitting in that [high school

English] class and the teacher to be thinking, “Who the heck was your English teacher last year?” And that’s the way I am.

I am a competitive person and I look at the scores and I would like to see us – first of all, I’d like to see us do better on standardized tests. But yeah, part of it is I’d like to see us do better in comparison to other schools in the district and other schools in the state. And yeah, I was pleased last year... I hate to say it... [what’s] that German phrase for that word when you are happy when your friend fails? I was happy to see... Or actually, it added to my happiness that our writing scores went up last year, and the District writing scores stayed the same... which meant somebody’s writing scores went down. Because if they all went up that would be good... but that would also be less impressive about what we are doing.

Adds another teacher, teaching within a non-Title I school:

[Teacher 13] With accountability... I’m finding that it is coming down to more of a competitive model. Who’s got the best teaching pedagogy that is going to raise the test scores?

[Teaching] Social Studies... I mean I was told straight out by an administrator that Social Studies doesn’t matter. So my job just became totally irrelevant.

Teachers in GSD recognize that some schools face greater challenges in ensuring all students are performing. Being labeled as “failing” can contribute to greater pressure and can result in lower teacher morale when schools are compared by the labels awarded to them each year. Some teachers at GSD shared that school to school comparisons fuel competition between teachers and between schools across the District:

[Teacher 4] I have to hold myself together when I hear other schools in our community and our school system discuss our [state assessment] scores. The implication is always that because test scores in the north of the city are higher than those in the south, that they are doing a better job than we are. It’s insane. I could make a strong case that, on the contrary, because we improved student performance more than the school in the north, that we did a better job. That would be equally unfair. All of us should be striving to do the best with, and for, our students.

I haven't seen the test that does a good job of measuring such performance. How do we measure [and compare] performance when we are dealing with such diverse populations?

Other teachers called attention to the limitations of relying on test scores as an indicator of student performance and as a means to evaluate teachers. Many of the participating teachers acknowledged the diversity of the students in their classrooms and the need to cope with the impact the varied readiness levels of their students will have on their scores from year to year:

[Karen] Do you think we can use [scores from state standardized tests] or any kind of score... to indicate who the quality teachers are?

[Teacher 14] No. Because they are comparing apples to oranges. And... the kids that I have one year... I get what I get. It's like a fruit salad... you know... or minestrone. I get what I get. And it's never going to taste the same one day to the next. And... so you cannot compare how I teach this year with how I taught last year.

In my opinion... if you are a good teacher... [you] have to [know your students and] go, "Ok I've got apples, oranges, and coconuts this year... what am I going to do with them?" And so their scores may be wildly different.

Adds another:

[Teacher 6] It's like the blueberry story...

A guy went to a school board meeting and said, "I'm a very successful businessman and if we ran our schools more like businesses... our kids would do so much better! I've been the best blueberry salesman in this country."

And a teacher said, "But sir, you get to pick your blueberries. We don't get to pick our blueberries. You get to throw out the ugly ones and the dented ones... We don't get to pick. We have to take the big ones... the little ones... the bad ones... the squishy ones... We take them all."

One of the most obvious practices that perpetuates a competitive school culture involves the practice of showing students' scores by grade levels or within teams. Though the Dufours advocate for the comparison of such scores to indicate which teachers are "teaching the hell" out of something, they caution that teachers' names should not be included in such displays. However, teachers in Green School District shared that this is not always the case and as a result, some teachers shared their concerns about the culture of their school becoming fractured and more competitive:

[Teacher 15] Just this week at a faculty meeting our principals presented all scores and led a data dialogue about the scores.

[Karen] Were teachers' names included when they showed the scores?

[Teacher 15] Yes. And the questions people posed at the faculty meeting really targeted a grade level... by accident. That grade level shut down... they cried. So some of us went over and talked to them afterward and told them it wasn't their fault... it was [one of the first years that] kids are taking the tests that are reported out.

Adds another:

[Teacher 10] Every month we have to give a writing test.

[Karen] Every teacher?

[Teacher 10] Yes.. But we have to score it 6 traits... and sometimes we have to score it *Write from the Beginning* because *Write from the Beginning* is the program that we have here at [our school]. So we've got to sometimes double score.

And then [we put those scores] into the computer... to our shared drive that can be looked at by everybody at the grade level and anybody in administration that needs to look at it.

[Karen] Do you ever think then we leap to, "How is that teacher doing and how is this teacher doing?"

[Teacher 10] I'm sure that the administrators look at that.

Adds another:

[Karen] When you were talking about putting scores up front... I assume other teachers knew that your scores were higher?

[Teacher 14] Yeah... And when the [state assessment] scores came out this summer... [those] in the office [said], "Oh look [this teacher's name] got the highest ones again."

[Karen] What does that do with your relationships with your colleagues?

[Teacher 14] It makes it really tough. It makes it really tough because they resent... I've actually been accused of cheating. I've been called a hypocrite.

[Karen] Called a hypocrite... because?

[Teacher 14] I have no idea why.

Many teachers at GSD have begun to question the practice of looking at test scores as the main indicator of student growth, arguing that by doing so, persons are not looking at the "whole child." Some elementary teachers identified the problem of sharing test scores by homeroom teacher when teachers have regrouped their students at a grade level for math or reading, or when teachers have departmentalized their instruction for different content areas and their homeroom students are dispersed amongst the teachers at the grade level for different subjects.

[Teacher 2] I think the hardest part for me was knowing that... [when you are sharing students' scores by teacher] that you are not looking at the whole child in that situation. The administrator thought he/she was comparing apples to apples and he/she really was not because of the way that our classes were made up. Our classes were ability grouped so even

though my scores were highest for my homeroom, I was not necessarily the one providing instruction for that particular subject [tested]. But then that created tension with my peers, too, because scores were compared by homeroom, not by who taught students.

So I think there is a dynamic of what the stress and impact [sharing students' scores publicly] has on the teacher. But I think the stress and impact that it has on the learning community [is significant]. You can't build a team if there is competition like that. I mean I think there is always natural competition, but I think that it creates unnecessary competition when scores are shared publicly.

[Karen] [Could you] speak to that example... where your scores were placed up there and you were called out as, "Let's see what _____ did... because his/her scores are so high."

[Teacher 2] I think for me what it did is... it created this uneasiness in sharing things because the last thing that I wanted was for people to think that I was better than them. I very much wanted to be a team player and I was mentoring the other two teachers on the team.

And so that just created a lot of tension. And the fact that the scores that were being represented were not my homeroom students was misleading because they were not necessarily the block of students that I had for literacy instruction.

The math kids were not my kids either... so the scores they were looking at... were some of my kids that I had taught but some of my students had been taught by other teachers.

[Karen] And that wasn't talked about?

[Teacher 2] No... the scores were up there and the comment, "Look at his/her scores... look at how much higher they are," was made. And then I was put on the spot... being asked what I was doing that they were not doing.

[Karen] In front of the whole faculty?

[Teacher 2] No, in front of the grade level team. And then my comment was, "Well I can't take credit for all those students... because 10 of those students were not in my classroom during that instruction. They were in other classrooms so I can't take credit for their scores."

It was not a pleasant experience because I was trying to stick up for my team members but it was not well-received by the administrators.

[Karen] Do you think [your colleagues] withdrew and shared more things exclusive – you know – outside of your teaming to try to catch up with you? Or you don't feel like that happened?

[Teacher 2] No, I think in that situation they knew that I was willing to share and that I was not trying to be better and... I don't think they got the impression that I was a better teacher than them. I think they knew in their hearts that they had done everything that they possible could for their students. A lot of their students [and] their scores ended up in my scores that they worked with. But I do believe it discouraged them.

[Karen] Did they ever look at where those kids were at the beginning of the year and at towards the end of the year? Or it was just, "This is where the kids are at the end of the year so this is what we are going to show."

[Teacher 2] It was just where they were at the end of the year.

[Karen] So even if your kids... if some of us got a group of kids that were rock stars at the beginning of the year... and they even fell. No one would even know that because we are just looking at the end of the year scores?

(Teacher 2 nodded.)

Shares another:

[Teacher 14] At faculty meetings they threw our AIMS scores and our benchmark scores up. Now it hasn't happened this year... but it [has] happened where they threw our scores up in front of the entire staff... without names supposedly... but you can tell by the number of classes... by the class periods... 'cause they showed them by class periods and this is when we didn't have common plans for [this content area]. So everyone knew whose were whose.

[Karen] And what did that do to the culture of your school?

[Teacher 14] It makes people angry. We are pitting our teachers against each other. But yet we are saying, "Everybody stand together, hold hands, and sing *Kum Bay Ya*."

[Karen] And share everything?

[Teacher 14] And share everything. But nobody wants to share... . They [principals and District administrators] keep saying, "It won't matter... and it doesn't matter... the benchmarks are formative, they are not summative." But you can't have it both ways then and throw scores up in front of [teachers at faculty meetings or in front of] principals [at a principals' meeting].

And another:

[Teacher 1] I might come across as being confident but I'm really not all that confident. If I look at the scores, and we have comparable classes and I'm getting blown out of the water by somebody down the hall. Then it's not going to be a sense of "Oh, I gotta compete with them"... It's more like I'd feel less of a teacher... "What am I doing wrong?"

Many of the ways that teachers at GSD are coping with the demands of the accountability era involve the ways in which they are addressing the "standardization" inherent of the movement. Examples of what is expected to be standardized include course or grade level curriculum, instructional practices of teachers, and assessments given to students to measure learning. Other means to standardize what goes on in schools involve how teachers are expected to comply with policies and practices mandated to them by the site, district, state, or at the federal level.

Some teachers fully endorse the need for standardization of curriculum to ensure a "guaranteed and viable" curriculum and eliminate the lottery of experiences students receive when teachers are left to decide what and how things should be taught within each course or grade level. As one high school teacher shared with me: "We decided a long time ago that the random assignment by the computer would not be the factor in determining what kind of learning

experience each student would get.” This teacher explained that as a team of science teachers, they believed it was in the best interests of their students to come to agreement about what was most important to teach and collaborate about the best ways in which to teach it. He indicated that this team of teachers had been regularly meeting for years, long before GSD expected its teacher to do so.

However, other teachers identified concerns about what happens to teachers and to kids when curriculum, instruction, assessment and the practices of schooling are “standardized.” These concerns are captured in the next section.

Coping with the Standardization of the Instruction and Work of Teachers

Some teachers of GSD cited the impact on teachers’ sense of efficacy and their enthusiasm for their work when they are required to do things the same or complete forms in pre-determined formats. Such exchanges reveal that teachers comply with said mandates, but in a contrived way:

[Teacher 8] We had a professional learning community meeting last Friday. That was so exciting. I mean... a bunch of us were together and we were talking about math and how to incorporate etc. etc. etc. And I will be honest with you. We’re having this authentic conversation... and all of us totally down-shifted when we were told, “Ok... Now create a SMART goal out of what you are talking about.” [Because] we had three pages of authentic notes... Ya know?

[Karen] Of what you were talking about?

[Teacher 8] Of what we were talking about. And I really have to tell you... I get it. I understand that. But if you want to slam the breaks on creativity and make teachers feel unappreciated and exhausted... Just tell them that their three pages of authentic notes don’t mean anything unless they get the shoehorn out and reword it so that it fits into a template. And I don’t care what the template is... And I don’t care how noble it is.

And you see that's the part that for me... the District makes a big mistake. Shame on them for getting us excited about professional learning communities. Because they ignored the teachers who had that cynical, "Yeah, right." Because the cynical teachers are the right ones.

Because professional learning communities are supposed to get you talking... and honestly... what we had planned. We had objectives... we were all excited. "Here's what I'm going to do, here's what you're going to do"... Fantastic.

But then again to have to get the shoehorn out. To me, that compromises what an authentic professional learning community really should be. Because I think it should be whatever gets teachers excited about teaching and learning.

And I don't think the District trusts that anything will happen unless they get the shoehorn and it fits a template.

Adds another:

[Teacher 9] I love the concept of the PLC. In theory it makes perfect sense for the teachers to talk about their teaching and to talk about their kids. You know... but unfortunately because it's tied into site improvement [plans] and certain persons' versions of accountability... I think that it gets a bit contrived.

Adds another:

[Teacher 6] So now we are sitting there... and we are concerned with... "Ok it's the 2nd week. Did we come up with our long goal? 3rd week... did we come up with how it can be measured? 4th week... Are we going to all have the same lesson plan so that we can get our (301 money)? What about our artifacts?"

And so you have these extrinsic guidelines that are there...

Along with collegiality in terms of PLCs I think because of the time [restraints]... the focus is just much more narrow... Perhaps maybe there isn't as much time as teachers would like for those, "How are you?" or "How was your weekend?" or that kind of thing... it's more like, "Ok, we have our list that we have to accomplish during this meeting, which has been outlined by our administration. This week we did norms... ok now we'll review norms... Ok, we need to go over our essential questions and our essential learning... OK, now this time, we are writing our rough draft

of our common assessment.” So, it really is time on task. We don’t have a lot of time for the warm fuzziness.

One teacher seemed to make a case for the standardization of teachers’ work across GSD, expressing a concern about fairness when expectations vary from site to site across the District. Yet, at the same time, she criticized what she considered the contrived format of the mandated lesson plan form required of her at her campus:

[Teacher 8] Let’s just look at lack of fairness. I worked at [a different] school fairly recently and... I can still say this is the truth... they don’t have to turn in lesson plans. I’m [now] at a school where I have to turn in lesson plans. Not only do I have to turn in lesson plans... [And don’t get me wrong], I believe they are extremely valuable. How can you teach and how can you have those teachable moments if you really don’t have a strong underpinning of what the heck you are doing?

But to have to change my format of lesson plan to accommodate another template when I know... and I literally do... I write a lesson plan for that... and then I use my own lesson plan. My lesson plan, actually, I think is a little more authentic and rigorous. But that’s beside the point.

Suddenly in midstream... we get another direction to add those four [Dufour] questions to the template. Now... if you really think about those four questions. Those should guide [our work]. [But no...] let’s create a whole new template.

[Karen] I’m curious about why you are going to turn it in. I mean, I’m very curious because...

[Teacher 8] [Because] we were told ya have to do that.

Teachers at GSD discussed the conflicts that can underlie the work of the PLC, especially when teachers agree to teach “standardized” projects or lessons and then colleagues abandon such plans and do their own thing in isolation, or when members of a PLC adhere to different teaching philosophies:

[Teacher 14] And we have some huge issues on the big PLC thing. We come to agreements to do things... supposedly... we think... and then people leave the room and go do whatever they want.

Well then that just creates anger on people who are following the rule part. It tears down everything.

We've tried to do the common projects and things... but [my colleague] says she'll do them and then she doesn't. She never helps... never does them. We spend hours in these meetings... and then she never [does them].

[Karen] So you spend hours in these meetings and you come closer to her philosophy and so you change how you're going to do it... and then she doesn't do it anyway?

[Teacher 14] Right.

[Karen] So you must have this tension?

[Teacher 14] It makes me angry. And it's very difficult... it puts us in really difficult positions. Because... you know... everybody knows everybody else.

On the smaller PLC level... we're having issues where we have extremely experienced teachers who are set in their ways and they are never going to change.

[Karen] And they've said that?

[Teacher 14] And they've said that. Or we have teachers who have just vastly different... like mine for instance.

[Karen] Teaching philosophies?

[Teacher 14] I believe in homework. I don't believe in a ton of it. But I believe it teaches kids responsibility. I also believe that I have so much that I have to teach them... that if I don't do some of the more concrete things that they can handle by themselves out of class... I'll never get the things that I need to help them with done in class. [But] my colleague doesn't believe in homework.

[Karen] The one that teaches the like content area on a different team?

[Teacher 14] Uhh hmm. We are supposed to come to an agreement [about what to teach]... so I have come... you know... this way [moves arm from high to a middle point].

[Karen] Down?

[Teacher 14] And I have come this way [moves hand way from one side to a midpoint] in all of the things I teach. But she hasn't come... she says she has come to meet me... [and] I happen to know that she hasn't.

[Karen] When you say you've come this way... and you are doing the hand motions that...

[Teacher 14] I've come down. I believe I am not as effective teacher as I was. And I still think I am effective... but I don't think I am as effective because I have changed to try to fit myself into the PLC model.

...I don't think it's done this [hands level at shoulder height]... I think it has done this [both hands lowered].

[Karen] So you've given up some of what you know to be best practices to try to get better... to try to get more closely aligned?

[Teacher 14] To try to do more things that they are doing... [referring to PLC members]. And even though... and she believes just as strongly...

[Karen] In her philosophy?

[Teacher 14] In her things...

[Karen] And maybe... pedagogy and personality wise... some teachers pull off things better than other teachers?

[Teacher 14] We are better than the other PLCs. I mean we actually... that's what's really sad. And I do see some merit because [my colleague] is really strong in the esoteric-like analysis stuff. And I didn't have that much of a background in that. And so I have learned a few things.

Now... do I think that that means that I should go out and teach like she does? No. And there is a huge miscommunication in the District right now... just talking with friends. Talking to other teachers on other campuses and on our own campus... that PLC means you have to do exactly the same thing.

[Names a different teacher from a grade level from her campus]... is just killing herself right now... because she is trying to make herself do everything that [another] colleague that has a completely different style... different method... is doing.

This same teacher shared her concerns about what happens when, after sharing strategies in her PLC, members try to standardize the content they will teach or the instructional practices they will use to teach it:

[Teacher 14] Language Arts... we are supposed to be teaching our kids to think here [interviewee makes a box shape with his/her hands and motions to suggest outside the box]... and we're not. We're putting them right in here whether they are round or square or diamond shaped they have to go in this... you know... box.

[Karen] I know you teach with multiple intelligences in mind... Do you think [that's changed]... or not so much?

[Teacher 14] Ummm... I have had to get rid of a lot of my differentiation... because I can't... like a lot of my follow up things that I do... I find that I never have time. There is never time to do what I know, inherently...

[Karen] They need?

[Teacher 14] They need.

[Karen] Because you are going to have to move on to the next standard that is going to be tested?

[Teacher 14] Right. And some teachers... I know a lot of teachers that have just blown it off... said, "Forget it and I don't care." I know one on this campus who doesn't do the writing benchmark and just makes up scores.

[Karen] Really? How do you feel about that?

[Teacher 14] It makes me angry... because... how can we possibly be teaching the kids to live in a society where you work together in a community and you do what you say you will do... and that's part of my role as a teacher of junior high kids... is to teach them how to be people

[laughs]... and how to work in a society... because let's face it... they are not going to be analyzing... you know... *Rikki Tikki Tavi* when they are thirty. And the teachers that get hung up on that piss me off... because that's not what's important. What's important is can they communicate in the workplace? Do they understand how to follow the rules and get along? And can they be people?

And junior high kids are trying to learn to be people and they are not quite there yet. You know... I mean in the truest form... and I love them dearly.

Still other teachers expressed concern about the lack of flexibility such standardization perpetuates and the impact this has on teachers' satisfaction for their work:

[Teacher 13] I think teachers are very compliant with what is brought down. There is resistance... It's not to say it is embraced. I think it causes a lot of dissatisfaction when an instructor is told that they have to standardize their instruction. That they are taking away some of the flexibility to create lessons that are going to attract the attention of individuals. I think that causes teachers to kind of downplay their role.

[Karen] So [to cope] they comply and sort of give up a little bit?

[Teacher 13] A little bit. "Ok... you know I mean... here we go... here we go." Or, "We are going to [go] ahead and do whatever is going to keep me this job."

Others cautioned that the standardization of instructional practices of teachers within a PLC may be disregarding the "craft" of teaching altogether:

[Teacher 9] All of the things that we learned in college... like differentiating instruction, individualizing instruction, taking the time to get to know your kids... you don't have time for it... particularly in the classes that are measured by [state standardized tests].

You know... and math teachers are all supposed to be on the same page and in the same text on the same day... just so that when the test comes... everybody can say, "Well... all the kids have been exposed to the material." And somewhere along the line exposure and teaching have kind of become synonymous. And I think a lot of the teachers that really understand the craft and the art of teaching feel like that's really bad. That

it's really like... A. It's taking away their passion because they can't be passionate... They are just information givers. Kind of like... you know when we talk about models of instruction... the ol' empty vessel model. I am the teacher... open up your brain... I'm going to pour it all in. And now I've done my job... I've given it to you. And we know that it doesn't work that way.

Coping with the Standardization of Students

Upon a visit to one of the high schools in Green School District, one of the teachers shared his frustration with what he believes is the movement to standardize students, and what students know. He said, "It feels like we are trying to push all kids through a more and more narrow funnel all the time. I'm not saying that schools should aspire to be like the military. But maybe the military is on to something when they take a look at the talents that their cadets have and they encourage them to pursue areas within the military in which they are interested and have some aptitude or capacity. Why would we want kids to be the same, moving through the same, narrow funnel?"

Other teachers shared similar concerns, indicating that they cope with the push to standardize students and what that means to students with respect to the relevance of curriculum and learning opportunities, and student engagement.

[Teacher 13] We live in a capitalistic society in which each individual needs to specialize in a particular industry. We don't necessarily look at what student competencies are early. You know, we teach to a socialist model where everyone is supposed to be the same. But in the end everyone has to figure out what they want to do. And if they don't figure it out... they get lost behind... and they end up doing labor that's beneath them.

When you're creating a standard sets of principles that they are to learn and they don't see the application of it... they lose interest. Why should they learn it? They don't see the real world application.

You know... if you come from a constructivist view where we acknowledge that students acquire knowledge... it isn't going to work if we situate students on an assembly line and try to attach a bolt in the form of a standard we want them to learn. It isn't going to stick.

Another teacher discussed how difficult it is to cope with the extra challenges placed on learners with special needs in the era of standardization and accountability:

[Teacher 9] We have a District mission statement of making kids lifelong learners. But what we do is make a lot of kids lifelong haters.

I have a kid... let's say he's failing science. Why is he failing? Well he is in Special Ed because he's got written language problems. So he goes in there and... If you go observe him in his science class... he's like number one. They are doing the lab and he's leading the whole thing. Say they are doing the microscopes... He knows how to work it... He's got the slides... He's got that... You know, he's leading the table.

And the teacher [says], "Ok, write up your lab. Write up your lab." He's the only one that can't write up the lab... because writing is so hard. So he is failing science... but he knows more than the other kids in his lab team. What's wrong with that picture?

Well that's how schools... in my mind... continue to fail children.

Adds another:

[Teacher 3] ... This year... one [teacher] said to me that, "There is like half an hour once a week when I have my whole class. They go to Soar to Success, they go to Read 180... some kids go to Gifted... there is Speech... there is this... there is that."

So I said... "Ok... let's take a step back... example LRC... doesn't matter where [a student] goes. They are all of our kids." And we have to have that communication piece going. So we're really... we've developed a couple of forms that the interventionists will send to the teacher on a

regular basis that this is what we are doing... Because so often they walk out the door and we don't know.

[Karen] We don't know?

[Teacher 3] We don't know... whichever direction... for enrichment or remediation. So that communication... it's been, I don't want to say forced... but it has been... you know... put out there for the teachers that this is what we are going to do.

[Karen] The expectation?

[Teacher 3] The expectation is that we will be sending this report home... now that we are working in teams... that piece has changed.

The other thing that has changed is that... along the same line... we all need to be on the same page as far as what the kids need. You know that some of our kids go to Special Ed. Well yes, I know they can't read the material. I know... bless their hearts... they can't read the 6th grade material. But if you expose them to fact and opinion at, you know, at a 1st or 2nd grade level in a reading passage... at least you are giving them a fighting chance. If you don't even expose them to what they are supposed to have in the grade level they just get further and further behind.

Coping with the Standardization of Curriculum and Assessments

As many states are in the process of adopting the national common core standards and the assessments to measure those standards, some teachers of GSD discussed how they are coping with the subjectivity involved in determining and standardizing what is most important for students to know or be able to do:

[Teacher 13] [Unfortunately tests that measure standards, they are] in my opinion... somewhat invalid... because it only [measures] one mode...

Standardization... it just creates an era of who teaches the best linguistic learner. Who does the best job of teaching this one type of student?

[Karen] How do we know that the kid... by [the state test scores]... that the teacher is responsible for the way that kid is performing?

[Teacher 13] And... what is it to say that those standards are indeed the best things that that student should be learning within that particular grade level? Those things are...

[Karen] Subjective?

[Teacher 13] They are very subjective. Each teacher would think that a student should learn a different set of curriculum within a particular class. And so now you have an environment where you are having every teacher in the nation [teaching] a set of curriculum that one specific group thought was the most beneficial set of instruction... within that particular grade level.

You know you look at students who are going in to college... they are very unprepared. [Many] students who are going to college aren't succeeding. You know... they don't feel like they've been prepared for that environment. They aren't learning the analytical, the problem solving... the creative thinking... because they are being taught these set of standards that [don't] hold the connection to their next level of education or into their careers.

Because every student is good at something. Some students are great at a multitude of things. But it really needs to be highlighted what they are good at... and build upon those skill sets.

If you are looking at Gardner's Multiple Intelligences... you know...our linguistics and our logical students are doing just fine. But our poor kinesthetic/interpersonals. You know our classrooms weren't made for kids running around and talking at will. You know those kids are identified as bad seeds and shipped off to remedial schools. You know... they have extreme strengths in moving around constantly and talking. They are probably going to be the world's best salesman if they're hired.

[Karen] Or a politician?

[Teacher 13] Exactly. But unfortunately we don't come from a strength model to identify those students and put them into places where they really deserve to be.

Other teachers challenged whether the practice of standardizing what students should be learning is a negative thing, as was evidenced by Teacher 6:

[Karen] I want to ask you something... I had a teacher tell me the other day that sometimes it feels like in our PLCs that we are narrowing what we want kids to know... and by identifying common ways to assess students... that is seems like we are trying to move kids through a smaller funnel. What do you think about that?

[Teacher 6] I think it's true.

[Karen] You do think it's true?

[Teacher 6] I think it's true. But then part of me says, "Is that bad?" I don't know. I think that being a student of this District [years ago]... It goes back to our beginning conversation about accountability. What are we being asked to do? To perform? This, this [and] this... Well that by nature is going to be very narrow in scope.

Some teachers of GSD shared that they feel the need to try cope with the quality of standardized tests, and the limitations of testing, altogether:

[Teacher 14] Standardized tests... let's just take [our District benchmarks] to start with. Um... I am... I like the concept, perhaps? But the application is extremely broken in my opinion. Because... garbage in... garbage out. And when you have... number one you cannot test... esoteric... you know... objectives. You can't do that on a standardized test. Because if we're trying to get our kids to think outside of the box... you cannot say, "Is it A, B, C, or D?" Especially with our gifted kids... because they're smarter than the people that write the tests.

And so a lot of times [students] see something that other people won't see. And so... I'm sitting here in my classroom wasting time trying to teach them, "You have to think down... and you have to find the best answer... not the right answer... you have to find what most people would say is the best answer. Your argument is valid... awesome... keep it... when we are not on a test. But on the test... you have to think like this."

Adds another:

[Karen] Tell me more about when you said that we're not really authentically assessing in the accountability culture that we are living in.

[Teacher 5] Yeah, well you know asking a kid to make a deep inference about a text that they are reading in a multiple choice format is just not feasible.

How can we truly measure that the child understands the concept of finding the theme in a piece of writing by giving them four choices?

[Karen] Because they can guess and get it right on a multiple choice test?

[Teacher 5] They can guess and get it right... this is always my biggest frustration... things aren't... especially with literature and interpretation of literature... things aren't always black and white. And they can't be black and white... and I think that asking kids to sit down for four days in the spring I mean... you know four days of their life of their entire school year... and [use those scores to determine] are they meeting standards? It's really unfair.

And so we are teaching kids to sit down in a desk and bubble-in an answer. And then we get frustrated when a kid says, "Just tell me what you want me to do."

[Karen] The kids... they are checked out?

[Teacher 5] Because they are. And we are, as educators... we say to our students, "Think critically and I want you to problem solve and I want you to share your ideas"... and the kids are like, "Just tell me what you want."

... I just don't think kids see real life application. They don't see that what we are asking them to do has any practical application in their life.

[Karen] If we weren't testing them, do you think they would?

[Teacher 5] I think if we weren't testing them we would be... as teacher we would be more creative in finding ways...

[Karen] To make it more relevant?

[Teacher 5] You know we get into such a mind frame... I mean I catch myself doing it all the time.. and I hate myself for it... You know I get myself in a mindset that, "Ok, if this is the test that is similar to what they might see on AIMS, then I'm going to use this. You know... it's just about the right length." And... when I look through my resource library of things that I have bought over the years... I have so many books that

are standardized test prep materials... and I'll find myself... for filler days.. "Oh, let's do this."

[Karen] Versus what those kids could be doing?

[Teacher 5] You know... I almost don't even know what I could be doing. Because you get so in the mindset of, "I have to make sure they are ready for AIMS. I have to make sure that what I'm doing is preparing kids for what they are going to have to do in April." Because that's all that matters.

Some of the teachers of GSD questioned whether we can distinguish the effects of test preparation from those of excellent instruction, as was expressed by

Teacher 3:

[Teacher 3] And the other thing was [on the last benchmark they] gave the kids a poem. But, from the poem... it asked, "What did the boy do after he fell down?"... But the kids aren't used to finding sequence in a poem. It isn't the way they are usually presented with that. But we took some poems now, and we wrote some sequencing questions. For some practice...

[Karen] Ok... I'm going to step back a little bit. Do you think the kids knew sequencing but yet it just wasn't – they weren't asked in a way to [allow them to demonstrate what they know]? That's my question.

[Teacher 3] I think often the kids know the skill but they don't know the test format.

[Karen] How often do you think?

[Teacher 3] More often than we'd like it to happen. You can take a passage and have a child read... even if you gave them some colored markers and said "highlight what comes first, second..." They can do that. There is so much. It just doesn't show a true picture... [there are] so many good things... there's so much growth.

[Karen] And no one will know... because the narrative is missing? And no one will know because he's still FFB?

[Teacher 3] Yes.

Coping with Outside Variables that Impact Student Performance

Teachers across GSD identified many variables outside of the classroom that impact student performance and “results” on tests. These teachers discussed how they cope with student apathy and the amount of parental support or involvement students receive from home.

[Karen] Do you see... do you feel more pressure about benchmark performance? Or [performance on state standardized tests]? Do you feel it or not so much?

[Teacher 8] Here’s the thing. I always took pride and I always put it on every resume when I tried to get any job. Whether I was in [named schools in this District and other places where this teacher had lived and worked]... You can track your scores... your kids’ performance scores. In [one district] it was Stanford Nine. My students always performed the highest. And I would put that... you know if I’m trying to get a job I always put this kind of thing in there. And now... I would be afraid to look and see how my kids performed. Because... there is a variable out there that I never experienced before... and that’s disinterest. Because the benchmark tests don’t capture their [true performance] because they are so bogused. And by the time [state standardized testing] comes around... they have practiced so hard at not caring... that you are literally teaching to the test in an authentic way.

One teacher shared that, to try to address apathy, she tried to frame the tests positively with her students to motivate them to try their best on the tests:

[Teacher 3] I also approach tests by telling my students that, “This is your chance to show others how smart you are. I already know.”

Last year, I asked one of the students, “Well, how did you do?” as he handed in his test. And he replied, “Well, I read it this year.”

Another teacher cited the role of parental involvement as a key factor in how students perform at school:

[Karen] So you are telling me that you challenge [the idea] that teacher performance can be indicated... and in some sense maybe even evaluated... based on student performance?

[Teacher 6] Oh a 100%... I've seen this a million times. If you took the student population of south [city] and swapped it for 9 weeks with the student population of north [city]... you don't think that [the schools in the north] wouldn't be underperforming? The teachers would stay the same! I get up in arms about this.

[Karen] And you think parental involvement has as much to do with test scores as teachers?

[Teacher 6] Oh... I would say it is 70 – 30. Yes... absolutely... if my kid isn't passing something? We could mandate interventions... but if they are not supported at home...

Subverting

McMahon (2000) cautioned that stress can make teachers less willing to engage in discussion with colleagues. Barth (2006) revealed that teachers sometimes guard their tricks and conceal what they do from other colleagues when the culture of a school reflects competition, fear, and suspicion. Such examples are evidence of subversive behavior, as teachers ignore or disregard mandates or expectations of administrators or colleagues – largely because they believe the mandate to be disrespectful or harmful to their students, or because the mandate or practice is incongruent with their teaching philosophy.

Teachers from Green School District shared that they engage in subversive behavior in a variety of ways, especially as that might mean withholding their knowledge, methods or materials in order to preserve their individual reputations. One teacher referred to the things teachers withhold as “The Sacred Cows:”

[Teacher 6] But you may have six colleagues [teaching at] your grade level. So sometimes they are like “Well, this is mine.” They have their sacred cows... protective of their things.

[Karen] Tell me more about the sacred cows.

[Teacher 6] For instance, in elementary school... I saw this all the time. [A teacher will say] “I do the ‘blank’ and my kids did great... better than anybody else.” [So another teacher will ask], “Oh, Can I see what you are doing?” [And at first, the first teacher may say], “Oh yeah, sure...” And then they will go out of their way [not] to share. In elementary schools, [teachers want] to toot their own horns about results but they [don’t] want to share their work products.

This sentiment was echoed by other teachers from GSD:

[Teacher 2] I would say the sharing... People [don’t] want to share as much... Because it was like, “Well, I have this great strategy that is working for me and I want to make sure I keep using it and I’m not going to share it with anyone.”

[Teacher 14] So you’re going to compare my scores with my colleagues and evaluate me based on those scores. Do you really think teachers are going to share all of their best stuff with colleagues under those circumstances?

Another teacher explained that she does not appreciate requests to share or hand over materials with colleagues that do not contribute to the team or complete their fair share of the work, citing questions about work ethic:

[Karen] How do you feel about sharing your materials you’ve created, in your PLCs?

[Teacher 7] That’s a tough one for me... I had a colleague from another school approach me and say, “If you are doing everything so great (based on a comparison of state test scores)... I want a copy of all work and the readings you assign, etc. I’ll give you my power points if you give me the work and readings.”

I said, “No. Yes, it would be nice if your kids do well, too.” But my bag of tricks may not work for [this teacher]. It’s about good, solid teaching.

I'm not a fan of handing over materials. Another issue for me is work ethic... when you work hard in the trenches and sometimes see other colleagues from your PLC leaving early every day... it's hard to sign on to that as a team.

Still other teachers shared that they have subverted by abandoning the decisions they made in their PLC or by dismissing the testing expectations mandated by the District, in order to meet the needs of their students or to be most respectful of their students:

[Teacher 14] This year... I feel like I am doing a disservice to my kids...because we tried to agree...

[So] I'm starting over in January when they come back in here... and I'm just going to go back to what I've always done. Which... then I feel guilty... because I'm supposed to do what they are doing in PLCs. [But] it's not what's best for my kids.

So I am kind of throwing it out...

[Karen] So you are going to step back...

[Teacher 14] I am... I have to. I have to because I will not feel right if I get to the end of this year and I haven't done what I normally do.

Adds another:

[Teacher 6] Because now I keep thinking... especially now like with the [benchmark] stuff. I just keep thinking this is ridiculous. Like the other day I had to do a benchmark make up. This little girl comes in... and she doesn't understand a word of English. And she's sitting in front of a Reading test.

I had to make a choice. She didn't look emotionally distressed... but I knew she didn't speak English. I could have her take that test. She could have guessed great. Maybe the results would show that she is exceeding. So not authentic...

I think a year ago I would have thought, "Oh good... I don't care... she's taking the test." [But] I just said to her, "I'm not going to have you take it." And I even put the call into my administrator and said, "I opted her

out.” I don’t care if the District opted her out. Her results, in a million years, were not going to be authentic.

I don’t want to see a number... I want to see more. And I think there are a multitude of ways we are going to see that.

Other teachers subverted by ignoring mandates altogether, explaining there simply is not enough time in the day to meet the responsibilities and demands of being a teacher:

[Teacher 8] What do you want them to learn? And how will you know they learned it? And all those wonderful [Dufour] questions that in utopia... yeah I guess they are important. There [are] not enough hours in the day. There’s not enough hours in the day.

Adds another:

[Teacher 9] I think coupled with it... there is a certain resentment amongst teachers... I think I have mentioned this before. Like we’re being run by an ADD leadership... ADHD. In that, every time you turn around... there’s another abbreviation that they want you to do. PLC in and of itself is great. But PLC doesn’t live alone. PLC is connected to SIP (School Improvement Plans)... and then SIP is connected to Moodle... and like Moodle is connected to Galileo... to technology... to Genesis... to School Fusion... and all the other things. And I’ve mentioned now all of these abbreviations.

And it’s like... you know what... there’s no coordination. It’s too much.

Adds another:

[Teacher 11] We get together... and we are probably the rebels of the PLC world... ‘cuz we get told all the time... “You are not following the Dufour model.” And I’m thinking... you know what? That, too, is an example of [totally mechanizing education]... there is not one right way to form a PLC... You have to form it around the needs of your [members].

[Karen] Who says you are not following the Dufour [model]? Your administration... or is it District level persons... or colleagues?

[Teacher 11] We get... actually more from colleagues.

We brought in [a few new] members [to our PLC this year]... and the first day we all sit down to create our norms. And we already had our norms set... but we were willing to you know... open that up... and they start going through the norms... and some of the norms I'm thinking to myself... those norms are never going to go over.

Because... I'm like... They don't realize that our conversations are...

[Karen] Conversations?

[Teacher 11] Conversations... and they are disjointed... and one of our members gets on to the topic of her cat... and the others over here are talking about this kid that's over here... and we jump... and then we pull ourselves together and move forward.

Another teacher shared that, while some of his colleagues have chosen to comply with District expectations, others have subverted and tried to avoid participation in school improvement initiatives or ignore the expectations, altogether:

[Teacher 15] [Some teachers] are kind of hoop jumping. Others have said, "Screw it. I don't want the [school improvement monies]." But our administrators have said even if you deny the monies, you still have to participate in school improvement initiatives... and that means PLCs this year.

Some of my colleagues have said, "So what are you going to do to us? Send the SMART goal police?"

Adds another, challenging the minimal standards of state standardized tests (the data they were asked to use when meeting in their PLC), dismissing their significance:

[Teacher 1] We have some teachers... that really don't care about the standardized tests. For one thing, they think AIMS is too low of a standard. So here at this particular school we kind of have people that are really focused on the test and those that [think] we can't focus so much on that test... because that's a low standard and we've got to be shooting for a higher standard. So I'm not really going to worry about that. I'm

teaching students to read or write to the best of my ability... regardless of what the state or District wants.

Some teachers indicated that they have witnessed or that they have participated in behaviors in which they are less than proud, including teachers requesting to have students removed from rosters so they will not have to include low test scores in their aggregate class scores:

[Teacher 3] Because there are teachers that, this is the lesson I'm teaching – this is what I'm doing – anyone that doesn't fit in my little world. I don't want you in here.

I've taught with (a teacher) that found every way... didn't want EIS kids in his/her room... didn't want the LRC. Was always looking for a place to... in a sense... he/she thought he was dumping. "I don't want them..." because when we took the Stanford 9 those kids then were not on the roster. So you could say his/her class average was 83. "Yeah, well you sent 12 of them out... I mean that's 10 kids less so you're probably gonna have [a higher average]."

Other teachers shared that they have observed subversive behaviors from colleagues as persons try to make sure that their students perform well on benchmarks, state assessments or other measures, including cheating in a variety of ways.

[Teacher 2] Well and then you get into teachers helping or prompting kids on certain assessments [like the D.R.A. or benchmarks] to ensure they did well or showed growth.

[Karen] What do you mean teachers prompting kids?

[Teacher 2] One time I was sitting in a room watching a teacher do a D.R.A. – they were prompting the students on the comprehension questions.

[Karen] In a way... to ensure the kid(s) would get the right answer?

[Teacher 2] Um hmmm... I see that done a little bit. There is a huge push with Accelerated Reader at our school so quite a few teachers prompt their students on the assessments because they know someone is reviewing their class scores.

[Karen] So you see that kind of thing happening?

[Teacher 2] There are people that look at those every single week and determine how the teacher is doing based on their [students'] Accelerated Reader scores.

And... so you have teachers cramming... having kids read three books a day to try to get caught up... prompting them on the test... things like that.

In what might be thought of as a unique form of subversion, some of the teachers in Green School District indicated that they have maintained their enthusiasm for teaching, largely because they have chosen to minimize or ignore the expectations of working in their PLC and the demands and pressures of standardization and accountability. Instead, these teachers have chosen to advocate for their students and focus on teaching as a craft. One of the high school teachers in GSD captured this form of subversion as he compared the art of teaching to that of a jazz musician:

[Teacher 9] I always come back to music analogies because that's my passion. It's better to do a simple song and do it well... then to do a lot of complicated songs... and confuse everybody.

[Karen] You said to me once... and it resonated with me... you said to me, "Teaching to me is like jazz." And I wonder if you could describe... what you meant. Why, to you, is teaching like jazz?

[Teacher 9] OK... I always make that comparison because I always say I am more of a jazz player... I always get in these arguments with my brother-in-law who is more classically trained. His idea of playing music is like, "Let's get the song... let's know the chords... we want to play it

the way it's supposed to sound." And I [say], "Well, that all works well and good... except that... life is not predictable like that."

I'm a jazz teacher because I look at it like... kids come into my room... I'm one person. And I have to have a sense of where we are supposed to go. And like when you play jazz it's like... we kind of play the chords... and then we kind of go off and people solo and people improvise. It's kind of based on their impulsivity and their feelings and their thoughts and they go different places. To me that is the art of teaching. The art of teaching is... kids come into my room. And I have no idea what's on their mind. They all come from different places with different backgrounds... They all took different routes to get to this room at this time. And so if I'm teaching a story or I'm doing something... I think it's more important... and again I think it's more of a philosophy on teaching. I'm more of a humanistic. I believe that learning is organic. It has to happen inside the child. And come to their cognition... rather than we throw it on their cognition and they automatically understand it.

It's kind of like where we started this discussion... we had the vessel analogy. And I'm the antithesis of that. To me... I call myself a jazz teacher because it is all jazz. I know exactly where I want to come in... I come in and there is a warm up on the board and that gets the kid focused. And... then I give them some information... and we are all in the arena.

But I can't in my wildest dreams predict what they are going to say. I don't know what they're going to say. So it's like I listen... I respond actively... active listening. Active responding... make sure they are answering a certain way. Ask kids to clarify... create discussion... create conversation. And then they come back and at a certain point we bring it together and we move on. Kind of like a jazz solo would happen.

And I would tell you that I teach four periods of English a day... sometimes five. And I try to teach the same thing in every class. Meaning that we'll study the same piece of literature in every class. We'll have the same writing assignment. And every single class is different. I can't tell you where the discussion will go. But I can tell you where I'm going to bring it back to. And hopefully every child will take something that is personalized to them from it.

[Karen] And you believe jazz musicians mirror that?

[Teacher 9] That was the thing... Like I remember listening to an old Charlie Parker album... Charlie Parker... he would just come up with an album... or he would just play Charlie Parker's mood 1, 2, 3, 4. And you

would listen to an album and get the same song... played ten different ways.

And Dylan's like that... Dylan never sings the song the same way twice. That's why people who just saw him last week at the state fair... I [said], "How was he?" And they [said], "I feel great, I saw a legend. But like he did *Blowing in the Wind* but it didn't sound like it." And I [said], "If you listen to Dylan... that's the whole point of what Dylan is about." You feel the energy in the room. You feel the energy at the time. And he's always trying to phrase it in a way that is real for him. And a lot of people can't handle that... because they were brought up on classical music.

They want the song to sound like they think it is supposed to sound.

[Karen] You are so passionate yet about the craft of teaching. How have you maintained that?

[Teacher 9] I have a different belief. My belief is that there are a lot of ways to get to the top of the mountain... Part of it is in all honesty... I work with a population of kids that is already on the outskirts of teaching and learning. It's a Special Education population. I work with kids that really feel outcast from school.

Other teachers' responses reflected this position. In what might be thought of as a passive aggressive form of subversion, these teachers chose to focus on their students, not standards, nor the practices of comparing students to each other inherent in the era of accountability:

[Teacher 11] I mean if you look at the standards as a teacher. As a teacher... my [standards]... and I have said this to everyone... I've said this to my administrators. My standards are the least important thing of what I teach. Because I teach kids first!

And what is most important is... if I have to say really... what does a person need to do to be educated?

What are we actually talking about is an educated, literate person. And it's not... "Once upon a time I sat in a room and heard a tape of *The Odyssey*."

They have to be able to think. They have to be able to problem solve. And they have to be able to communicate with others. And everything else is superfluous.

Adds another:

[Teacher 10] [Teachers] are all caring people... which quite honestly... is a whole lot better than this awesome, go gettun' kind of teacher... [it's most important] to have a caring teacher who cares about those kids. Because the kids are more than... just their education... and their Reading, writing, and arithmetic.

[Karen] And scores... ?

[Sighs...] Gosh... yes.

Adds another:

[Karen] So it is the students?

[Teacher 9] It's all about the students.

[Karen] That [keep] you passionate about your work?

[Teacher 9] Yes... Why else would you be a teacher? Not for the money... And it always has been and will be about the students. I mean if you didn't have students... what would you have? School would be a form of empty... just scholars hanging out. Arguing about like what the best test is... It doesn't mean [anything] unless there are kids in the room.

Adds another, suggesting she views education as a "calling:"

[Teacher 1] I don't see teachers as heroes. Maybe as missionaries... but not as heroes. I just don't like the sappiness of it...

[Karen] Interesting... why missionaries?

[Teacher 1] Well...

[Karen] Because they take a vow of poverty? (Both laugh...)

[Teacher 1] That too! I don't know. What does a missionary do? They bring... they spread the word... and our religion I guess is education. I think it's a calling... but I don't think that makes a teacher heroic any

more than a, ya know... a priest... who I have a lot of respect for priests also in general – but they're not heroic. Right?... A teacher who bars the door when they are coming in for Columbine... that's a hero. But getting up there and teaching... you're just... you're doing your job.

I'll give us a little more credit than it's a job. I think it's a calling. That's why it's kind of like missionary work. And the other thing that makes it like missionary work as opposed to being a priest. A priest... the people that come to mass... they are there because they want to be, in general. Missionaries have to work with people that would scalp them if they got the chance... [and that's how it is for teachers].

Adds another:

[Karen] [Despite your frustration with the PLC process...] You seem to have maintained your enthusiasm for the profession... how so?

[Teacher 15] Every year I love it more. I think I get it. At this point... I know what kids need to know. I tutor kids so I know all the grade level and content area expectations within my subject area. I have it all. And I know where they are going next with this.

And every year I build relationships with my kids. I have fun all the time. The only thing that gets me down is going to teacher meetings... because everyone is down there.

And still another:

[Teacher 13] With respect to [state standardized tests]... if I save two students from dropping out that otherwise might have dropped out... by creating a meaningful and relevant learning environment... I won't be recognized. But it's the most important work I do.

If I get fired because I taught the group that wasn't seen as supposedly the most successful, "best"... that's most important to me... that everyone has a chance.

And... at least I would know I went out swinging.

Negotiating

Responses categorized as negotiating show evidence of teachers trying to bargain with colleagues or with site or District level administrators to broker a compromise with the expectations, mandates, practices, or policies. Recognizing that some of the long standing practices of schooling and those new to the landscape within the current era of accountability are not set up to ensure or support the success of all students, some teachers of GSD shared that they try to negotiate with school administrators to bend the rules in order to meet the needs of their students:

[Teacher 11] But... the tracking... the paperwork component... It's much easier to throw out a standardized test to kids and say "Yes, you have this on track." Or... "No, you don't." And the implied pressure to the teacher is you better teach to that test... so that you look good.

But instead I have to run this... this contiguous... like a little heart monitor at the hospital. Where I'm like... I've got all my little hospital beds... and somebody has a blip over here. And I gotta deal with this blip.

I haven't gotten it to the point that I feel like it's under control. And by under control I don't mean the kids are under control. I mean under control that they are not... that I'm getting it at the symptom stage and not the full blown disease. I mean I still have kids that implode... and then we have to go... Ok...

[Karen] Crash cart?

[Teacher 11] Yes. Crash cart! Let's take this down... we can do this... we can work through this.

Something else the system is not set up to do... [and our] administrators hate when we do this... and it is totally not what they want to do...

But there are some kids... who at the end of the semester they are failing... and they are just not ready to move on... or they're... not that

they aren't ready to move on... but they just... they weren't ready for the material in the first semester.

So [I've convinced my administrators to] let my students go on to the second semester and depending on the level of growth... I'll let them go back and redo work [from the first semester]. And I've given them make up work that they come in and meet with me...

[Or] on weekends [they've] done additional assignments... and then I go back and change the first semester grade.

[Karen] Wow. And [your administrators] let you do that?

[Teacher 11] Not really. [Participant says with a smile to indicate "yes."]

[Karen] But you try?

[Teacher 11] Yes. Because... our system is set up as if kids are all on the same [grade] level and they can be measured within the same time frame. [And they are not.]

Some teachers shared that they have bargained with school or District officials to allow other achievements of students to be celebrated, acknowledged and afforded as much attention as students' performances on standardized tests:

[Teacher 6] And I go round and round in my head and I think, "God, I spend 90% of my day looking at numbers and say 'Hey, he's not meeting the standards...' Ok but if he's doing..."

When I see a kid who came in last year who had four or five in school suspensions in the first semester alone. Who had no respect for authority... no respect for himself... and could have given a shit about anybody. Who is now is on student council... who now likes coming to school... who trusts his teachers. I'm not going to see that on the [state standardized] test.

And... I'm not saying that the other stuff isn't important. But we have to have a culture where we have permission to take all of that in. And on the days that I'm feeling the most pessimistic about education I can't think those other thoughts 'cuz I'll walk out the door.

Adds another:

[Teacher 11] The number of times that we were collectively called in to justify what we were doing to prep for AIMS... even this year... because as we have worked collectively as a team to kind of raise the bar in rigor... the number of times that we've been spoken to about, "Well why are these kids failing and what are you doing? What interventions? I mean this is an administration that knows that we have a 5-tier program of interventions... as well as a tutoring program at lunch... for at risk kids.

But it's that kind of administrative pressure.... "We've gotta prep for AIMS!" ... that I actively combat. [I am constantly telling our principals] AIMS is not our goal... AIMS is a side piece. AIMS is minimum standards. And not everything can even be effectively assessed on the AIMS because some things are too subjective. And if all we teach is the AIMS we run into the same problems as with [our benchmark system]... We are not really producing the kinds of students that we want to produce.

This teacher explained that she tries to negotiate this position with her colleagues in her PLC and within her department, too:

[Teacher 11] The culture [of our school] is total AIMS pressure.

[Karen] It's more competitive?

[Teacher 11] It's... I don't know... It's not competitive amongst our [department]... well... I take that back. One of [my colleagues] does feel competition. And it's not necessarily that she feels competition of, "I must do better"... but she does look at it. She came into the profession and into this District when [our benchmarking system] was just starting. She has been indoctrinated from the beginning with the, "You must perform... you are measured... you are compared." In that it's been in the language... and it has been a big stepping stone and hurdle to... as a team... work with her to remind her specifically that our goal is to teach the freshman or sophomore curriculum... and AIMS is a byproduct. We don't ignore [it]... but AIMS is not our curriculum. EPOs are not our curriculum.

Another teacher explained how he has challenged the narrowness of elective offerings at his school, negotiating space for other options to be considered. This teacher shared that he has asked district and site level

administrators to consider restructuring the ways schools are organized by semester at the high school level:

[Teacher 4] Insofar as electives are concerned, we are placing so much emphasis on requirements and supportive education to ensure the requirements are achieved, that the electives are practically non-existent. We have what I might refer to as a “Sheepskin Psychosis.” We try to put everyone on the college track to the detriment of the kid who wants to get his fingernails a little dirty. This is especially true in GSD.

Now, students earn credits by dodging whatever is difficult. Kids are taking four years of resistance training for credit, or dance. The metaphor is asking a right-handed kid to practice right-handed layups when he can’t hit a bull in the ass with a barrel stave left-handed. We give kids credit for working on their strengths. All the Hispanic kids take Spanish for credit. All the jocks take four years of PE. We give them choices, not challenges.

[Karen] So what do you think the answer is?

[Teacher 4] For one thing, we can’t teach cubicles, but more important, we can’t teach in semesters. Semesters of instruction is ludicrous. A better solution would be to design units of instruction shortened to periods of time of a week, or even less. I could have a module that I am responsible for teaching and students should remain in my classroom until it’s learned. When they get it, they move on. If they don’t get it, they don’t lose a semester’s worth of credit... they lose a week’s worth of credit.

... High schools should consist of thousands of modules that we believe are important for students to know. They should be arranged in logical hierarchies so that students can work their way through the curriculum. I can envision a student working through dozens of these modules at any one time.

Requiring a kid to repeat a semester, let alone a year, at a time is a disaster. We couldn’t design a better motivator to encourage dropouts if we had tried.

One of the teachers in GSD challenged the idea that we can accurately assess uncommon students in common ways, negotiating to allow other means of

varied assessments to be used to allow students to demonstrate their learning in different ways:

[Karen] [Recently a student heard that we were talking about creating] common assessments and he said to me, “What’s common about kids?”

What do you think about that? Can we choose to assess kids the same way... when we are talking about [multiple intelligences and different skills sets]? How do you feel about that?

[Teacher 13] Well I think it’s not an “either or”... but one of those “and boths.” It’s one of those things... we can learn a lot about teaching practices by giving standard assessments. But at the same time... it shouldn’t be the sole proprietor of how education is judged. Because as we have been talking about... there are a multitude of learning modalities... [that are] going to generate different scores on those tests. And there is no way the test... I mean as we sit right now... there is not a way to measure each student’s competency.

I think where we should be heading is ways to measure individuals in their different competencies. To give a standardized, bubble-in test for every subject for every student is setting yourself up for failure. Once again... it is the socialist method. You know... It is trying to say that every student should be the same. And they are not. I mean you are looking at students who are from a various intellectual background... a variance level of social capital coming in. You know... some students you look at some work that’s been done at what student perceptions are of tests and some students freeze up.

At the end of the day the test scores are going to benefit just a certain type of students. It’s not very much of a valid measure of teaching effectiveness when you are looking at a multitude of different intelligence types that a teacher that is reaching everyone is really growing.

This same teacher indicated he tries to negotiate with school and district leaders to try give equal attention to social studies, an untested subject area on state standardized tests:

[Teacher 13] Personally... I don’t think that’s.... in terms of core competencies where our country lies. I mean you look at what our

country does and it's appreciate the uniquenesses of everybody. You know... diversity is our key aspect. You look at other nations. You look at China... You look at uh... the Scandinavian countries. They are very much homogenous. And they don't necessarily have the capacity to interact and gain those skills while growing up. We have that right here. We have a perfect training module to foster individuals who are capable of interacting on the world stage in all different industries. And I don't think that we are highlighting on those skills.

Social studies is an area that is going to bring about those awarenesses. That's going to get students to interact and appreciate the multitude of cultures... and appreciate the different aspects of diversity... and why it's important to have diverse members of any group that you are in... as well as how to keep our democratic/republic civilization strong. I mean without social studies you really lose the appreciation of why you should be a responsible citizen. Citizenship loses its meaning.

And if you are looking at policy makers... I mean... the number one way to gain more power is to reduce the amount of information that is disseminated amongst the public. So why would you promote more education of social studies?

[Karen] That was my next question... There are people that think that's been intentional...

[Teacher 13] You gotta wonder...

[Karen] If it's intentional?

[Teacher 13] Right. And if it's not intentional it's still... it's not like they are promoting or there is a wide push from our policy makers to get more information out to the masses. You don't see that. It's not like you see people on their platforms talking about, "Hey we need to get more information into our school about public policy."

It hasn't been on the campaign front that I've seen. It's always been, "Let's create some more robots that are going to be able to do you know... computer work." And personally I'm very passionate about it because I'm a very proud American and I'd like to see our country be successful at what we are already good at.

Another teacher explained that she has negotiated and changed how the teachers at her site share student scores, to try to create an atmosphere of

collective responsibility for student learning across grade levels instead of using the scores to determine which teacher may be teaching something better:

[Karen] When [teachers at your site] are sharing results... do they see the other scores?

[Teacher 3] What we have done... we print by grade level.

[Karen] It is not by teacher?

[Teacher 3] It can be broken out by teacher. They can break it out by teacher. But the first report we get is by grade level... so [our teachers] know they are all of our kids. That is the biggest thing we are trying... they are all our kids.

[Karen] And is that working? So that they don't take it personally, you think?

[Teacher 3] I think it is... Yes. It is our group. It is getting there. We are working so hard in our PLCs... trying to get teachers to look at, "This is our 4th grade"... So we asked if we can get [state standardized test] reports like that – by grade level [in all reports in the future].

[Karen] Why would you be asking for that?

[Teacher 3] Because they are working together... and to make them see that they are all of our kids. Because there is still that piece of a teacher that says... "Oh I've got to make sure mine are better than so and so..."

[Karen] That's what I want to ask you... Do you feel that more this year? Or not as much?

[Teacher 3] No... I think people are trying... because of the way that we are pushing... selling it is the whole thing. So no one is saying... Well [there are] still a few saying... but fewer are saying, "Well, my kids got 80 % so I don't have to worry about that." So if we can break away [and get our students' results by grade level]... that helps... everything will come back that way.

[Karen] That would make a big difference?

[Teacher 3] That would make a big difference. And then teachers would not feel when they send their kids to all these interventionalists, "Yeah,

and my name is on their test.” [We’d like it to come back and indicate] “5th grade” on the test.

This same teacher continued by explaining that given teachers’ name are associated with the students’ scores from their homerooms, one of her colleagues has tried to bargain with school administrators by asking that her students not be pulled out of her classroom to attend special areas or special services provided by the school:

[Karen] So do you think that that teacher is saying, “I wish they’d stay here because I want to work with them because my name is on the test.”?

[Teacher 3] Yes... my name is on the test. You know you can always control what comes out of your mouth. You don’t know... and it’s nothing against other people...

This same teacher shared that she has tried to negotiate with District personnel to distribute the number of special education and gifted students across the District, to ensure that all schools make AYP, or to ask that each of these students’ scores “count” at their home school if students are brought to different campuses to access more appropriate special services:

[Teacher 3] ...We are the feeder school for all these programs... and that’s hard... you know... very hard... there has to be some balance some way.

We’d love to keep those kids... but then send their scores back to their home school.

[Karen] So they are diversified... ?

[Teacher 3] Yes. And the same goes with... you know we’ve sent gifted students to [other schools with] self-contained gifted programs. No wonder they are getting the numbers... If we had 3 self-contained gifted classes. Yeah, I think the scores should go back to their home schools. [And I continue to advocate for this with District administrators.]

Collective Resistance

Collective resistance means that teachers refuse to comply with a mandate or practice and instead, opt to crusade with allies against the mandate or against those that have proposed the mandate. Many teachers in GSD are aware of the grand narrative perpetuated by the media that continues to portray education, and educators, as failing. Some challenge that the systems within the current era of accountability appear to perpetuate and not “fix” the problems inherent within the policies and practices at work in schools today. Thus, these teachers indicated that they work tirelessly to disrupt the grand narrative and counter-crusade on behalf of their students in the following ways:

[Teacher 8] Frank Smith... wrote an article, “Let’s Declare Education a Disaster and Get on with our Lives.”

He says education is just like the Titanic. You don’t send the engineers in and say, “How can we fix this thing?” You just get the heck off. And... it’s never depressing... although in the beginning of it you think, “Oh, he’s such a cynic.” And yeah, he has a right to be. But then at the end he says... teachers need to get the lifeboats in the water and get the kids on the lifeboats... and to fill those lifeboats... and here’s where he is just the most starry-eyed person... with the most engaging and meaningful activities that make them love their learning. Because ... and then he says, “Because isn’t that what we are there for?”

Education is a nightmare. We have all these politicians and the media bashing us... and saying how it could be better... and we are in the trenches trying to make it work. Nothing’s going to change. It is a system that cannot be fixed. So thank God for teachers that go into this profession... Our biggest commitment is that we somehow manage to make kids think learning is fun.

[And so in response and as a means to make a difference, I’m considering running for a leadership position in our teachers’ organization in Arizona. If I win, I intend to actively campaign for candidates in our state

legislative system that will support education and defend teachers in Arizona.]

Adds another:

[Teacher 14] And education... education is so broken. And it makes me so angry... as a taxpayer... that all this money is being spent on these tests... that really are crap. And I'm sorry... I hate to be... but they are crap.

And... it tells us nothing except a way for the superintendents... and leaders of the different districts to stand up and say, "Rah Rah Rah look at what we are doing and how great we are." But it means nothing. But our public thinks it does.

[And so I'm constantly talking with my husband and his colleagues in the business world to promote a better understanding of what standardized students' scores represent.]

Finally, one teacher shared how she rallied with teachers at her school to deface a well-intentioned banner placed in the teachers' lounge by the parent organization, in an attempt to crusade against the ritual of using students' scores to indicate teacher performance:

[Teacher 6] At the end of the day I don't ever want someone to say to [us], "If you don't get to this point, then you can't be a teacher." Ok... let's talk about teachers and learning. Are you measuring [us] as teachers or are you measuring [our] students? Because I've told you... I'll tell this story all day long. At [a former school that I taught at] when we went from performing to highly performing... a parent with very good motivation put up a big sign up in the teachers' lounge that said "[school's name] teachers are highly performing." And [we] crossed that out and I put "excelling." And then I put "[school's name] *students* are highly performing." That bugs me... that stigma of if your students are "excelling" than your teachers are "excelling."

Escaping

At a site visit at one of the high schools in GSD, a teacher shared that she was retiring early and getting out “just in time” so as to escape the demands of the accountability movement that she believed are not in the best interest of students. Throughout the inquiry a handful of other teachers shared that they would like to “escape” by retiring, but that they were no longer in a position to do so as a result of financial losses they had recently incurred as a result of the changes in the economy.

There are other means of “escaping” at work in GSD. Though they were not reflected by the conversations with the 15 participants of this inquiry, some teachers across GSD shared that they have tried to switch content areas to move out of those that are most tested and that are under the most pressure to perform. Others shared that they have been tempted to switch schools to escape the pressures of teaching at a Title I school, even though they indicated that they were passionate about continuing to support the students at their site. Still other teachers indicated they had tried to request a transfer to a different PLC, grade level, or content area on their campus to escape from working with some colleagues that may hold very different philosophical positions about teaching and learning.

Summary

The varied experiences of the teachers in GSD captured and categorized in this chapter reveal the complexity of working in a professional learning

community within the context of the era of accountability. Though I found evidence in the form of teachers' responses that fit into most categories of the typology, clearly the bulk of teachers' responses fell into the coping, subverting, and negotiating categories. This is significant. Considering what teachers are coping with, why some admit that they engage in subversive behaviors, and why some feel the need to negotiate with these practices and mandates is important as researchers try to better understand the pressures inherent in the current accountability measures. Further, consideration about whether the varied responses of teachers serve to resist or reproduce the grand narrative that suggests schools and teachers are failing is critically important at this time, especially as both public and political perceptions continue to influence policy and shape the experiences of teachers. These considerations, and questions about the hidden curriculum that may be conveyed in the practices and policies mandated under the guise of educational reform, are teased out in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

EXAMINING LARGER IMPLICATIONS

Implicit in the proposed “solutions” perpetuated by those advocating for educational reform are largely hidden and rarely-discussed assumptions about the purposes of schooling, the roles, responsibilities and identities of teachers, and fundamental issues of teachers’ power, authority, and control -- issues that have been long addressed and challenged by cultural and critical theorists around the world. In this chapter, I examine the larger consequences and implications of what I have discovered throughout this inquiry. This chapter begins with remarks from teachers in Green School District as they define “accountability.” This is meant to provide context about the meaning teachers attach to their collaborative experiences within an era of accountability. Next, I employ various dimensions of critical theory to begin to unveil the hidden curriculum that may be conveyed in the practices, policies, knowledge forms and assessments privileged in educational reform initiatives, and the unintended consequences that ensue as a result of them. Later, I consider how teachers may be reproducing or resisting the dominant messages perpetuated by the media, the business world, and both state and federal layers of government that continue to fuel the calls for teachers and schools to be held more “accountable,” and that may serve to empower or disenfranchise the teachers working collaboratively within schools today.

Accountability as Defined by Teachers

If it weren't for the kids, it's just not worth it anymore," shares an elementary teacher the week before the statewide assessments are scheduled to be given.

Says another teacher, "All of this 'teach to the test' stuff. Teachers... [we] are so pressured to pass these tests. It's just sapping the joy out of being a teacher. It really is."

Adds another, "We're not doing any justice to our kids right now."

And still another, "Teachers are embittered. I don't really like the person I have become since I've been teaching. Because I'm bitter and angry."

Comments such as these are frequent across Green School District. Teachers of GSD are acutely aware of the pressures inherent within the era of accountability, though they define and interpret accountability differently, as is evidenced by the following:

[Karen] When I say accountability movement... what does that mean to you? As a teacher... what do you think of?

[Teacher 12] Well... the two things that come to my mind [are]: One, what does the other guy mean by accountability? And what does accountability to me?

There is nothing wrong with accountability. However if you are going to call accountability making me... making me... prove myself... through... teaching to a test... or [by saying] we've got to push ourselves to achieve "x" on benchmarks and [state assessments] and common assessments... I think you are barking up the wrong tree. I don't think that's accountability. I think that's management, and it can't be tested.

True accountability to me is saying professionally, "You're a teacher. Your job is to make sure you get these 133 kids in August and by May

30th of next year, you have brought them... knowledgeably brought them... their knowledge from this point where they came in... to this point where they exit.” And they know things that they didn’t know before... things about how to learn [that] they didn’t know before.

Adds another:

[Karen] When I say the accountability movement... what do you think of when I say that?

[Teacher 10] Making myself accountable. Showing how I’m accountable. It is more work, I mean...I agree that we need to be accountable for our actions and what we do because it’s the kids that normally that will benefit from [our actions].

Adds another:

[Teacher 7] The clock is not ticking... it is BANGING all the time. I don’t have the luxury of doing the really neat things I want to do.

And another:

[Teacher 11] My assumption when you ask about [the] accountability movement... [is that] it is everything involved in that attempt to quantify what is going on in the classroom so that it can be compared, and evaluated... in terms of some kind of standardized method of [determining] how students are progressing in what we have identified as the content, or the skills, or strategies... that they need to know.

The word itself is, I think... the core of the controversy. Or it at least reflects and mirrors the controversy. Because accountability implies that without this... you would be doing something [else].

It’s a slap in the face. It’s a, “If we didn’t have this in place... there would be no quality of education.”

But the core of it is also, how do you evaluate progress? How do you evaluate success with the end goal of identifying need for improvement... and then targeting that improvement?

The fundamental flaw with the accountability process is that we are so focused on the immediate regurgitation [of information]... not even the learning.

And so we have become... instead of a program of rigor... and by rigor I don't mean work load. We are not pushing thinking... we are pushing regurgitation. Because a standardized test needs to assess the practical, not the abstract. And if we want educated, critical thinkers for the next century that are really going to be able to combat the conditions and the problems... they have to be thinkers and problem solvers. And you can't assess that on multiple choice [tests].

Adds another:

[Teacher 13] You think of the potential... and possibility. If [our] job was assessing... and creating... and guiding... and that was it? Imagine the possibility and the growth that is possible within each and every student. But with everything that is brought down and passed down... you know... the trickle down. Unfortunately... part of that just missed a beat.

And you do as much as you can... and you put in your day. And you pedal as much as you can for that day. And you hope you did the best job.

You think of the potential of what it could be. And I think that is what is most frustrating for the instructors... and for everybody in education right now.

Adds another:

[Teacher 8] It's getting harder and harder [to be passionate about teaching with] all of these outside intrusions [trying to ensure accountability]. Now in fairness... I'm going to be very objective. Federally, they had to try something. It's not going to work because I do believe the boat's sinking. But there was such an atrocity of service being done to kids. Particularly in the southeast of the United States where they were promoting them... as they aged they were promoting them... who were illiterate. Putting illiterate kids into the masses. And they had a diploma. So they had to do something.

... But it's just getting harder and harder for teachers to succeed. I just commend anyone who still gets into this profession. And you almost want to put your arms around them and protect them from everything and just tell them... keep your kids happy.

And still another:

[Teacher 4] [With respect to teaching in the era of accountability]... In many respects, I am convinced that we did a better job of educating kids

forty years ago than we do today. But, of course, society has changed and certainly our population, here at our school, has changed. The one constant is that teachers do not feel valued.

Some teachers of GSD have chosen to focus on the potential benefits of what being held “accountable” might mean to their students, including that teachers in all content and special areas would be more likely to teach district and state adopted standards to ensure “like” experiences across grade levels and across the school district, as opposed to freely exercising the professional judgment to determine what is most important to teach. But other teachers frame the accountability era differently, identifying insidious consequences of the accountability movement. Such consequences include the changing perceptions of some teachers about the abilities of their students, as is evidenced by the following:

[Teacher 5] The biggest thing has just been that pressure to make AYP. It has a lot of our teachers questioning the ability of our students. I’ve heard a lot more in the last couple of years of, “These kids can’t.”

[And] I think it has impacted how we interact with our administration. There's such a heavy, heavy, heavy focus on standards... what standards are addressed and teaching to the standards. How are we teaching to the standards? You know, there's just been a huge amount of pressure.

Other teachers cited the impact the stress and pressure is having on teachers’ relationships with one another and with their students, and the loss in teachers’ sense of efficacy with respect to their teaching.

[Karen] Do you think [it] puts pressure on the relationship between the student and the teacher... if they are going to be evaluated based on how their students do? If the teacher is going to be evaluated based on how the student does... does that change the dynamic?

[Teacher 8] Yes... Because I want to be successful. [And if] I'm not successful, how easy is it to say, "It's not me... it's the kid. They won't do the work... If they would just do the work." So... it's a natural tendency to not be able to express it. So you get cynical and say... "I'm doing everything I could possibly do. If they won't do it... how could I?"

And then you've got the [lack of a] sense of personal accomplishment. "Nothing I can do is going to help." [So] you just give up. [We've] talked about efficacy of kids. Well that's in teachers, too.

Clearly, teachers of GSD identify challenges and pressures inherent in the accountability movement. But how teachers are responding to them varies considerably, in part, based on the personality of the teachers. As one teacher shared:

[Karen] Do you think [teachers are feeling] like they are all in this together? Or do you feel like it is competitive... or what do you think?

[Teacher 3] What I think is... that a lot of that depends on the personality of the teachers. Which is a lot of what happens. People respond to the same situation...

[Karen] Differently?

[Teacher 3] Depending on each person and who they are. That's who he/she is... that's just how he'll/she'll do it. I think everyone has a desire to be successful. So it has brought some persons very close together. [But] there are people that are negative ordering a hamburger at McDonalds. That's just who they are.

Many teachers of GSD struggle with the tension about how to best meet the needs of their students when the demands of the accountability movement privilege quantifiable measures of student learning over other areas of student development. Some teachers have begun to recognize the tension inherent in what they have been asked to do as they are expected to work together collaboratively,

but are evaluated and singled out based on their individual performance. These tensions, and questions consistent with the larger implications of this study, are considered in the remainder of this chapter.

Theoretical Frame

Educational reform initiatives that call for collaboration and participation in PLCs are rooted in a reconceptualization of teachers' work. They are approaches to staff development that honor teachers' professional judgment and foster the autonomy, collegiality and efficacy of teachers. But implicit in this reconceptualization of teachers' work are assumptions about the purposes of education, what knowledge is of most worth, how such knowledge should be assessed, and the roles and responsibilities of teachers and schools in engendering or disseminating knowledge forms. To tease out these assumptions I draw mostly from the scholarship of critical theorist Michael Apple and a researcher heavily influenced by his work, Jesse Goodman, in this chapter. Their work provides a lens with which to illuminate the relationship between ideologies and educational thought and practice, and to study the commonsense assumptions that guide the work of schools and the teachers working within them, today. Further, this lens allows us to look beyond the rhetoric and indicators of accountability and excellence to examine the practices of standardization, systemic interventions, and comparison of schools, teachers, and students that may be impacting teachers, shaping their practices, and influencing school policy and culture.

What is the Purpose of Education?

Teachers in GSD participate in the Dufour model of PLCs, dedicated to the idea that the primary purpose of schools is to ensure that all students learn. According to Dufour et al. (2006), the fundamental purpose of schools is to ensure that all students acquire what teachers determine to be the essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions important to their content area or grade level. In the high-stakes testing and accountability climate, it is understandable that reform initiatives endorse this purpose. At first blush, this purpose seems so sensible that it is easily justified and accepted by many educators in GSD, with policy makers of all levels, and with the public, today.

While student learning is obviously imperative, Apple contends that the purposes of education and schooling are far more complex. Rather than simply asking whether students have mastered subject matter and have performed well on common tests, Apple maintains we should ask a different set of questions when discussing the purposes of education, including: Whose knowledge is this? How did it become “official”? What is the relationship between this knowledge and who has cultural, social, and economic capital in this society? Who benefits from these definitions of legitimate knowledge and who does not? And what can we do as critical educators and activists to change existing educational and social inequalities and to create curricula and teaching that are more socially just (Apple, 2006; Apple, 1996; Apple and Beane, 1995)?

Some of the teachers in GSD noted that students of varied cultural or socio-economic backgrounds do not receive the same “experiences” in schools. Indeed, some critical theorists have long challenged the notion that schools serve the purpose as the great equalizers. They counter that education is rooted in inequality, and that it serves to prepare kids for an unequal future so as to sustain the status quo. They explain:

Contrary to the claims of liberal theorists and historians that public education offers possibilities for individual development, social mobility, and political and economic power to the disadvantaged and dispossessed, radical educators have generally argued that the main functions of schools is the reproduction of the dominant ideology, its forms of knowledge, and the distribution of skills needed to reproduce the social division of labor. (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1993, p. 65)

Apple maintains that there is more than enough evidence to suggest that public education, whether intentionally or unintentionally, has become inextricably involved in reproducing and legitimating inequalities based on persons’ class, race, gender, sexual orientation or disability. He challenges that the policies and practices that support seemingly commonsense purposes of schooling often have strikingly unforeseen consequences. Sometimes, even those instituted with the best of intentions may have hidden effects that are more than a little problematic due to an unequal distribution of resources, tragic levels of impoverishment, the ways policies are implemented, and the cleverness of economically and culturally dominant groups in using reforms for their own advantage (Apple, 2006).

Several teachers from GSD noted that though they receive little space or attention, other broader, purposes of education and schooling exist. Indeed, Goodman (1992) wrote about a connectionist perspective, where the purpose of schooling is to help children become more compassionate, and where students engage in collaborative, critical thinking about their educational experiences and the powers at work that inhibit or create a more just, caring world. Critical pedagogue Paulo Freire (2004), too, acknowledged that schools have the potential to serve a much larger, democratic purpose. Schools adopting a purpose of this sort foster opportunities for students and teachers to critically reflect on the world and, in some cases, engage in social action to transform and right injustices, creating a more socially just society, altogether. Given the current focus on measureable results, these other purposes for schooling are often overlooked today.

What Counts as Knowledge?

Some of the teachers of GSD shared their concerns about working within a system that privileges quantifiable measures of student learning over other areas of student development, and one that shows little recognition of the value for challenging what it means to educate persons. Indeed, having teachers narrow in on and “teach” things they may not believe in is highly problematic and is indicative of what critical theorists maintain represents the political nature of the knowledge forms privileged in education.

According to Apple, “Education is... a site of conflict about the kind of knowledge that is and should be taught, about whose knowledge is ‘official’ and about who has the right to decide both what is to be taught and how teaching and learning are to be evaluated” (Apple, 2004, vii). He provides a critical framework that might begin to explain how “certain knowledge – particularly that knowledge which is considered to be most prestigious in schools – may in fact be linked to economic reproduction” (2004, p. 33). Apple believes these knowledge forms are a form of hidden curriculum and cultural capital that reflect the perspectives and beliefs of our social collectivity and that serve to perpetuate and distribute the ideas and values of the dominant culture. When schools act as if all children have had equal access to the different knowledge forms of cultural capital, they implicitly favor those who have already acquired the linguistic and social competencies to handle middle-class culture (2004, p. 31).

Apple (2004) and Goodman (1992) insist that historically, the main function and role of “curriculum” has been to legitimate these knowledge forms, allowing certain groups greater access to power and privilege. They claim that “back to basics” movements and the focus on “basic skills” have served to privilege and canonize a body of knowledge rooted in Western civilization. According to Darling-Hammond, the impact of back to basics movements and a focus on discrete skills can be dramatic:

We learned from teachers... they spend less time on untested subjects, such as science and social studies; they use less writing in the classrooms in order to gear assignments to the format of standardized test; they resort to lectures rather than classroom discussion in order to cover the

prescribed behavioral objectives without getting “off the track”; they are precluded from using teaching materials that are not on prescribed textbook lists, even when they think these materials are essential to meet the needs of some of their students; and they feel constrained from following up on expressed student interests that lie outside of the bounds of mandated curricula. (Darling-Hammond, 1985, p. 209 as quoted in Goodman 1992, p. 142)

Many models of collaborative forms of professional development, including the Dufour et al. model, encourage that *teachers* have the autonomy to determine which essential ideas, skills, and dispositions are most important and educationally significant to teach. But it is clear that with the current emphasis on accountability, teachers are not allowed the total freedom to determine what is educationally significant, as they are dependent on a bank of state or national curriculum standards already determined by policy makers, corporate interests, and educational publishers. Though some teachers in GSD indicated they had been given the autonomy to select the four to five most important things for students to learn each semester, given the reliance on standardized testing, the knowledge that gets into schools is already a choice from a much larger universe of possible social knowledge and principles. Thus, even when teachers are allowed to choose the knowledge forms and determine the best means to teach such knowledge, their choices are not value-free as dominant social and economic values are already embedded in the knowledge forms, modes of teaching, and in some forms of evaluation that are pre-determined for teachers (Apple, 2004).

Some teachers in GSD revealed that they felt compelled to teach content even when they believed it not in the best interest of their students, sharing that

they were frustrated by the constraints of what others have pre-determined are the standards that are most important for students to learn. Others shared that they did not feel like they had the time or autonomy to involve students in the choices about what to learn. Indeed, clearly missing in schools today are the voices of students regarding what knowledge they believe is most important to learn. Freire (2004), Goodman (1992), Aronowitz and Giroux (1993) and Dewey (1916) have long advocated that students be seen as partners in education, and that students and teachers engage in open dialogue about what should be taught, as opposed to teachers following prescribed, restrictive, sanctioned, or formalized curriculum. They cautioned that curricula pre-determined by state, national or local teachers of officials can disenfranchise students, restrict student curiosity, limit individual creativity and, consequently, further perpetuate the status quo (Goodman, 1992).

How Should Knowledge be Assessed?

The practice of regularly sharing and comparing students' results championed in the accountability era, endorsed by most models of PLCs and practiced by teachers across GSD reinforces a dependency on standardization of what is taught, the pacing of what is taught, and how students are assessed. This calls for further understanding of what prior research has revealed about "standards."

Proponents of standards believe that they ensure quality education, particularly since they allow for testable results that would enable comparisons to be made between schools and across districts (Apple in McNeil, 2000). Couched

in the rhetoric of improving educational quality and holding schools, teachers, and administrators more accountable for their professional practice, state and federal organizations have reified standardized curriculum, tests, instruments and controls to monitor students' learning and teachers' classroom behaviors (Apple in McNeil, 2000). As a result, standardized curriculum, testing, and "systematic responses" to evidence of students' learning are pervasive in schools today.

But critics have challenged the practice of standardization and the ritual of using student tests scores to monitor accountability, maintaining that the emphasis on students' learning as measured by standardized tests may perpetuate an emphasis on discreet skills. Linda McNeil (2000) found that standardization actually reduces the quality and quantity of what is taught and learned in schools. She discovered that the imposition of standardized controls reduced the scope and quality of course content, diminished the role of teachers and distanced students from active learning. Perhaps most concerning, McNeil revealed that the discriminatory effects of standardization were immediately evident for students who have historically scored low on standardized assessments, as standardization of curriculum and testing widened the gap between the quality of education for poor and minority youth and that of more privileged students (p. 3). Further, McNeil disclosed that when standardization becomes institutionalized and teachers, principals, and schools are assessed based on students' learning, entire school experiences can come to be dominated by an attempt to raise students' test scores.

Apple (2006) maintains that there is a good deal of evidence that policies that endorse national or state curricula, standards, and testing may actually reproduce or even worsen class, gender and race inequalities. Regardless of the intentions of policies or practices, Apple warns that the existing structures of economic and cultural power often transform such policies into another set of mechanisms for social stratification.

What do Systematic Responses to Student Learning Look Like?

Most educational reform initiatives, including the collaboration practiced by teachers in GSD, do not rely solely on standardized test scores to indicate student achievement. Most recommend that teachers use a variety of sources including common assessments, student work, benchmark scores and state assessments to create a comprehensive picture of what students know and to determine which teachers or schools might be using the best methods to teach specific content. But many models of PLCs call for schools to provide systematic interventions in the form of remediation or enrichment, based on evidence of student learning. These remedial interventions come in a variety of forms including the regrouping of students to reteach or enrich specific standards, or required student participation in study halls, peer assistance groups, intervention programs, or tutoring.

Many of the teachers in GSD shared that their students are often targeted for remediation or for opportunities for enrichment based on their performance on common assessments, benchmark scores, or state standardized test scores. These

remediation and enrichment experiences varied across GSD. Some teachers indicated that opportunities for remediation are embedded into their school schedules based on students' results on standardized tests from the previous year. Other teachers revealed that interventions on their campuses came in the form of small groups of students meeting together for short periods of time, or regularly scheduled support courses within the school day in an exchange for an elective or in place of other content areas. Though these practices are rooted in positive intentions to ensure all students are learning and that no students fall through the cracks of the school system, we would be wise to pay attention to them. "Systematic interventions" and "opportunities for enrichment" may very well be paving the way to improved learning opportunities for students, or they may be further perpetuating a long established system of tracking, stratification, and discrimination.

Teacher Empowerment or Disenfranchisement in the Era of Accountability

Recent reports have suggested that large numbers of public school teachers believe that high stakes testing and accountability measures have had a negative impact on their students and on teaching and learning. Many of the teachers across GSD agree, indicating that they have breached what they know to be respectful of their students in order to meet the externally mandated curricular or assessment expectations placed on them. In response to the pressures to produce results, some of the teachers in GSD acknowledged they participated in what might be considered unethical behavior. Most indicated they do not like

competing with their peers, nor compromising what they believe to be in the best interest of their students. Working within a system that is largely beyond their control, many did not seem to believe they had the opportunity to choose otherwise. This tension can lead to teacher disenfranchisement or disempowerment.

Goodman (1988) studied the process of teacher disenfranchisement and found the trend to be very complex. He challenged the rhetoric about creating excellence in education and the motives behind the push for teacher competency and accountability. Goodman found that while this push served to perpetuate the disempowerment of teachers, the movement likely reflected much more entrenched and powerful forces at work in society. He warned that even in the late 1980s, the disenfranchisement of teachers was developing in ways similarly to those experienced in other occupations in earlier decades. Goodman questioned whether this collective disenfranchisement might be part of a broader movement to systematically control and eventually degrade the nature of teachers' work. He found that when curricular and instructional programs are based on the principles of efficiency and social control, they reduce the role of the teacher to that of task master and shop worker, as is indicated by the following:

[Prepackaged instructional programs] emphasize the study of utilitarian skill over substantive content or artistic talent; the sequential segmentation and memorization of knowledge over synthesis and holistic understanding; and the standardized, quantitative, evaluation of pupils' work over the informed judgment of the teacher. (Goodman, 1988, p. 212)

Goodman concluded that the social forces at work in schools served to rob teachers of significant decision-making power and deprived them of a sense of ownership of their professional development activities and the development of their craft, and this led to teacher disenfranchisement.

Apple weighed in on teacher disenfranchisement, too, noting that the significant shift in public discourse in education over the last few decades may be at the root of teacher disempowerment. This shift has impacted the discourses persons engage in when thinking about the role of education in society and when situating the responsibility and blame regarding the success or failure of schools. Educational policies and practices, including the gross under-funding of public education, have not been seen as responsible for student underachievement over the last two decades. Rather, underachievement has been blamed on teachers, students, or a curricula identified as lacking in rigor.

Most collaborative forms of professional development intend to disrupt this cycle of disempowerment and disenfranchisement, including the Dufour et. al model of PLCs endorsed by GSD. These collaborative forms of professional development seek to empower teachers and situate them as both responsible for and capable of doing whatever it takes to ensure all students learn at high levels. Dufour et al. maintain a “no excuses” approach to education. Consequently, they genuinely champion the efficacy of teachers, using data and stories to show that the quality of the classroom teacher is the most important factor in student learning. They dismiss the work of researchers that have identified the

contradictions in school reform measures and the complex challenges in society as factors contributing to student achievement as, “defensive responses on the part of weary educators” (Dufour and Eaker, 1998, p. 12).

While well-intentioned, this claim warrants some unpacking. Hanushek et al. (2005) released studies showing that teacher quality accounts for only about 7.5–10 percent of student test score gains. Several other analyses echo this finding, maintaining that teacher quality accounts for around 10–20 percent of achievement outcomes (Ravitch, 2010). While teachers are recognized to be the most important factor to influence and impact student achievement within schools, other research suggests that non-school factors matter far more than teachers. Some estimates indicate that as much as 60 percent of student achievement is explained by non-school factors, such as family income (Ravitch, 2010). Thus, while teachers can and do have profound effects on students in a variety of ways, their influence pales in comparison with students’ backgrounds, families, and other factors beyond the control of schools and teachers. It would be short-sited to believe that teachers are solely responsible for student success or that they alone can undo the damage caused by poverty and its associated burdens.

Fueled by globalization and driven by a free market society, policies and practices in schools today continue to demand that teachers and schools produce measureable gains in student achievement. Given the many factors that impact student learning, some teachers within GSD expressed their concerns about the

implications of using students' results as the main indicator to measure both student and teacher performance.

The Hidden Curriculum

Words such as “efficiency,” “blame” and “control” are frequently heard within educational discourses today. The usage of these words suggests that:

If teachers and curricula were more tightly controlled, more closely linked to the needs of business and industry, more technically oriented with more stress on traditional values and workplace norms and dispositions, then the problems of achievement, of unemployment, of international economic competitiveness, of the disintegration of the inner city, and so on would largely disappear...” (Apple, 2004, p. xix).

Clearly, the responses of teachers in GSD indicated that they are aware of these discourses that challenge the quality of their teaching and their commitment to the profession, and they recognize the politics involved in education and schooling within the current era of accountability.

Critical theorists remind researchers that some policies inherent in schools are covert, situating blame in insidious ways to sustain and promote the capitalist system. Such policies may locate blame within individuals (too lazy, ignorant, or unskilled) rather than blame the conditions of existence, and the value of wealth specific to capitalism (McLaren and Farahmandpur, 2005).

Apple (2003, 2004) uses the concepts of ideology and hegemony as critical theoretical tools to analyze and understand how curriculum, teaching, evaluation and schools produce and reproduce forms of consciousness that may prevent teachers from seeing the systems as they really are. Whereas ideology can be thought of as a set of beliefs, the concept of hegemony is more complex.

Hegemony represents a whole body of practices and expectations including education, the family and work that, collectively, make and remake an effective dominant culture. It can be lived at such depth that, according to Gramsci (1971), it saturates society and constitutes the very limit of commonsense for most people under its influence. Consequently, ideology and hegemony often work in tandem to reproduce dispositions and meanings that will sometimes cause persons to accept existing (and alienating) economic roles without too much questioning (Apple, 2004).

Apple (2004) contends that reform initiatives that strive to “empower” teachers may run counter to the current realities of the division of labor within education as a work force, where teachers have little say over the ideological and economic conditions of their work. Overstressed with the demands and responsibilities of teaching, teachers have little time to reflect on the systems at work in schools today including the policies, practices, knowledge forms, assessment strategies, and responses to students’ learning privileged by educational reform initiatives. Thus, teachers may be unwittingly maintaining or reproducing the ideas and values of the dominant groups in ways that serve to legitimate their domination in unintended ways.

The distinction between the reproduction and resistance is significant. According to Giroux (1988), teachers that engage in “resistance” tend to acknowledge the presence of both the intended and hidden curricula, and they actively work to subvert, reject, or change the ideas and values perpetuated in the

hidden curriculum and in the policies or practices of schooling that perpetuate inequality. Those demonstrating resistance maintain that schools cannot be analyzed outside the socio-economic context in which they operate, and they try to expose the practices in schools that sort, track and teach students differently. In contrast, teachers that “reproduce” dominant ideas and values tend to accept and perpetuate a monolithic view of domination and a passive view of human beings. Teachers that reproduce the grand narrative and ideas and values of the dominant culture generally ignore the presence of the dominant culture in curricula and the existence of the hidden curriculum at work in schools today.

The interviews with participating teachers across GSD revealed instances of subtle forms of resistance and the reproduction of ideas and practices inherent in accountability measures. Examples of both are provided, next.

Evidence of Reproduction

Clearly, teachers’ responses that were categorized as “embracing” within the typology serve to reproduce the status quo conditions in education. But many of the behaviors of the participating teachers in GSD that work to reproduce dispositions were categorized as “compliant” or as “coping,” the latter when participating teachers acknowledged that they are likely perpetuating the current conditions in education as a result of feeling powerless to act differently. Some of these coping responses reflect that teachers may be fueling the construct of “efficiency” championed in the era of accountability, especially when they succumb to pressures to work like task masters and “cover” all of the standards.

Despite the fact that many entered the profession to enlighten students, some of the teachers from GSD shared that they feel pressured to cover material to ensure students are exposed to the content they will see on standardized tests. These teachers indicated that though they want to engage their students at higher levels and involve them in the decisions about their learning, they succumb to the pressure to “cover” the content and abandon activities that may stimulate intellectual engagement and passion on the part of students. Thus, “efficiency” of getting through course content often trumped opportunities for students to establish the relevance of content or to allow them to reflect or engage deeply with the material.

One of the reasons teachers of GSD may be feeling pressured to “cover” content is that today’s schools seem to be mirroring the efficiency movement perpetuated by Franklin Bobbitt (1918, 1924). Bobbitt developed a process to establish curriculum based on the principles of scientific management Frederick Taylor (1969) had proposed to make American industry more efficient. Taylor believed workers should be given narrowly defined production assignments, following precise steps established by outside efficiency experts. Bobbitt applied Taylors’ work to curriculum development, establishing curriculum in schools based on the roles persons fulfill in their lives. Bobbitt believed that children should be assigned to specialized curricular tracks, determined by their intellectual abilities. This placement often resulted in tracking students into destinies for life.

Some of the teachers in GSD indicated that their schools sometimes reflect and reproduce this efficiency movement, perpetuating this model when students are “ability grouped” for remediation or intervention blocks, or when homogenously grouped to lessen the variance in the readiness levels across content areas. Other teachers of GSD may be reproducing dispositions in the current era of accountability when they place confidence in the practice of using students’ results or scores as an accurate measure of good teaching, as is indicated by the following:

[Karen]... Do you think that [state standardized tests] or any test score... is an indicator of good teaching?

[Teacher 5] Well... good teaching?

[Karen] Do you think that scores indicate good teaching?

[Teacher 5] I think partly. Yeah... I do. I really truly do believe... and this is where I think I fall down personally as a teacher... I truly believe that a gifted teacher can show growth in a student no matter what.

[Karen] On test scores?

[Teacher 5] Yes... I really do. Well... let me qualify that answer. If I could administer in the first week of school the [state standardized tests]... and then administer in the last full week of school the [same] test... and truly measure growth? Absolutely I think you can show growth on those tests.

Adds another:

[Teacher 1] Teachers teaching AP especially up north... and these are the great teachers in the district. How about the great teachers in the district come down here (referencing the south end of the district, where the student populations are far more diverse) and work?

Why do the best teachers work with the best students? That's the question?

[Karen] I don't know that they do. Why do you think they are the best teachers? Because of the kids' test scores?

[Teacher 1] I don't know. Maybe by reputation. I don't know. That's a good question...

Perhaps the most veiled evidence of reproduction in the responses from participating teachers from GSD are those that were categorized as "compliant." Compliant behaviors might be thought of as complicit behavior. With little time for reflection, teachers exhibiting compliant behavior may be unconsciously reproducing dominant ideas, values and dispositions in the era of accountability. As a result, they may become further alienated and accept the current practices in education and the existing economic roles assigned to teachers, with little questioning.

Evidence of Resistance

Resistance from participating teachers across GSD came in various forms. Most of these behaviors were categorized within the typology as forms of subversion, negotiation or counter resistance. Other evidence of resistance included that some teachers acknowledged the influence of cultural capital, and

the varied degrees of cultural capital held by students. This was discussed by

Teacher 13:

[Teacher 13] [I absolutely think it is the school's job to try to create opportunities for students to develop their social and cultural capital.] The school's job is to maximize the [opportunity] of every student. And if we are to do that then we need to engage those students in an environment that is going to provide them the utmost foundation on how to progress their education. If they don't have the cultural capital to move on into the classroom in advanced levels of their education, then we are basically saying that the educational model is a selection process in which certain individuals in society succeed.

[Karen] Do you believe it is?

[Teacher 13] I don't think it should be.

[Karen] But do you think it is?

[Teacher 13] I do now.

[Karen] That it sorts, separates and divides?

[Teacher 13] Absolutely. There is a certain type of individual... your logical/linguistic students who are from a majority ethnic background that... those students are going to be looked at favorably and any student that lies outside of that standard mold is going to feel invalidated within the environment. And once a student feels invalidated and that they don't belong within that environment... what is their motivation to continue?

Other evidence of resistance was shared by Teacher 4, acknowledging the political nature of standards and challenging the ways they are measured:

[Karen] Are you saying that standards are political?

[Teacher 4] Of course, they are political, but not by definition. No one is against high standards. The question is how the standards, how they are measured and why they are measured, are applied. How does a school that has a high population of at-risk students achieve an "Excelling" label, for example? Are teachers who are working with at-risk students less qualified than those who are working with the "elite" and prosperous students of [the north side of our district]? Even if we match the efforts of

our sister schools, how can we ever catch up? Martin Luther King asked, “How does the caboose ever catch up with the engine?” Of course we won’t catch up. By definition, a prosperous school in a wealthy community affords more educational opportunities than one in a poor school district. I believe funding formulas serve the very purpose they were designed to serve. That is, to keep the poor in their ‘place.’ The wise use of the measurement of standards would apply greater resources to poor, “underperforming” schools...

My point is, I don’t know any teachers that are against testing, even high-stakes testing. The problem is in trying to evaluate separate schools, and separate districts, as if each is operating with the same students; students with identical backgrounds and resources.

If anyone seriously believes that the predominately Anglo kids at the northern schools in our district are receiving better instruction and have better teachers than the predominately Hispanic kids in the south, then it sounds to me like we have a civil rights’ case.

Echoing the concerns shared earlier by Teacher 6, another teacher showed evidence of resistance when he challenged that teachers could be accurately evaluated based on what students’ learn as indicated by standardized tests and measures, versus how teachers have actually taught the information:

[Teacher 12] I can’t be held accountable for whether you learn what I’m doing... if I’m doing it well... by your standards... our standards. Professionally... I’m doing it well... that’s what I want to be held accountable for. I can’t be held accountable for whether Susie or Frankie actually learned it. Because I only have them at best [for] 50% of their waking day.

And how do you... how are you held accountable for that? You are held accountable for what you do. How you do it... rather than... who actually learns it.

Finally, many of the participating teachers in the inquiry demonstrated resistance when they challenged the cultural relevance of the standards imposed by state and federal mandated curriculums, as well as the cultural insensitivity

represented in tests designed to measure those standards. Evidence of this form of “resistance” was shared by Teacher 13:

[Teacher 13] [I recently read that] only 33% of the assessments in K-12 have real world applicability. So that leaves the other... 67% that's completely busy work. And I think students see right through that... I think they are getting bored. You know that they've found that the number one thing that alleviates boredom is relevancy. And the number one reason for student dropouts is boredom... [so if we are going to address relevance, we have to assess our students differently].

[Further]... you look at some work that's been done at what student perceptions are of tests and some students freeze up. There are certain minority groups that freeze up because they feel the tests aren't aimed at their group. So initially before they even start taking the test they feel they are going to bomb on it because it wasn't formed by someone of their background. [Thus, the scores are biased from the start.]

Summary

Though teachers' participation in PLCs has many positive benefits, at least in some settings, collaborative forms of professional development may be legitimizing forms of discourse that serve to further situate blame for student underperformance or underachievement as largely the fault of students, teachers and administrators. Many of the responses of the teachers in GSD categorized as compliant, embracing, or coping are likely reproducing the ideas and values of the dominant culture and those perpetuated by the media and business world. In contrast, the responses categorized as subversive, negotiating, or that show evidence of collective resistance may serve to resist the current conditions and disrupt the grand narrative at work that depicts public schools, and public school teachers, as failing.

The work of critical theorists offer an entry point to challenge the discourses in public education that perpetuate the construct of efficiency, calling for tighter control of teaching and of teachers, and those that endorse a curriculum of a common culture. Thus, the questions posed by cultural and critical theorists are important as they allow researchers and teachers the possibility of critiquing and disrupting the educational discourses that privilege the practices of high-stakes testing, standardization, and accountability. Such questions may promote dispositions that serve to create the conditions and experiences that support public education and public schools, and the educators working within them.

CHAPTER 6
SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS FOR
FUTURE RESEARCH AND FINAL THOUGHTS

Research consistently reports that opportunities for regular, school-wide, collaborative learning are critical in building the capacity of teachers to improve their instructional practices, increase student achievement, and ensure school success. As a result, current educational reform initiatives center on providing opportunities for teachers to collaborate and agree on what is most important for students to learn, determine how to assess that learning, and make plans to respond with systematic interventions and opportunities for enrichment based on students' results on various forms of assessments. While some researchers contend that participation in collaborative forms of professional development does more than boost student achievement, improving students' results receives the most attention given the accountability measures in the current climate.

This study examined teachers' collaboration in context. The experiences of the teachers from Green School District substantiate the body of research that illuminates the challenges and complexity of working in professional learning communities and other collaborative forms of professional development, situated within the present era of accountability. This chapter includes a brief discussion about how persons might measure the "success" of PLCs in GSD. Perspectives of participating teachers are explored, revealing what readers might take away with respect to this inquiry when pressures to perform and produce measurable

“results” have never been higher. Recommendations for future research are included in the second part of the chapter, and final thoughts for consideration about this inquiry are included at the end of the chapter.

Were PLCs in Green School District “Successful?”

Proponents of school reform initiatives recommend that learning organizations set goals to improve teacher performance and increase student learning. According to Elmore (2003), collegial support and professional development in schools are unlikely to have any effect on improvement of practice and performance if they are not connected to a coherent set of goals that give direction and meaning to learning and collegiality.

Teachers of GSD were expected to write SMART goals in their collaborative teams, an essential step in the Dufour model of PLCs. This meant that teams of teachers first established their “current reality” by looking at various forms of their students’ data to identify areas of strength and potential areas of improvement. Based upon that current reality, members of PLCs were asked to write SMART goals to address improvements in student learning, aligned with any school goal(s) designed to promote academic achievement. The criteria for a SMART goal includes that they are: Strategic and specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-Oriented, and Time-bound. As it applied to GSD, the latter meant that the goal could be accomplished within a unit, quarter or at some point within the academic year. Members of PLCs were asked to identify action steps to achieve their SMART goal(s), along with realistic time frames for persons to

accomplish them. PLCs were asked to establish clear, intended outcomes for student learning, and teachers were expected to collect evidence of that learning throughout the year to demonstrate their progress.

At the completion of the school year in which I conducted the interviews, I returned to the participating teachers and asked them if they believed their PLC was successful. I did not establish a criteria for measuring or evaluating success, but allowed “success” to be interpreted and defined by these teachers. Most of the participating teachers in GSD indicated that they were successful in achieving their SMART goals, as they were written. All of the participating teachers indicated that they were compliant in writing goals that were measured by student performance on common assessments, benchmark tests, or AIMS, as was the expectation in GSD. Little consideration was given to the success of PLCs as might be measured by other factors. This is likely because less space or attention was afforded to other forms of data that might shed light on various aspects of student development outside of academic performance, including students’ participation in school activities, their interests or concerns, their skill at constructing meaning through conversation or when engaging with text, and the development of knowledge or understanding that has value beyond the classroom.

Further, little attention was given to other ways in which PLCs might be measured as successful with respect to teacher behaviors, including how persons learned to work together or in what ways teachers’ collaborative interactions impacted the cultures of their teams or their schools. Clearly, the varied

philosophies held by teachers, the different ways teachers responded to the pressures and mandates expected of them, and the differences in the culture of the schools across GSD impacted teachers and shaped what happened in their PLCs as they worked together. Challenging which results are used to indicate student development and what behaviors from teachers are valued will be important to consider when evaluating how persons might measure the successes or challenges of PLCs in the future.

What do the Responses of Teachers from GSD Reveal?

Teachers of GSD responded differently to the various layers of expectations and pressures inherent in the policies and practices in education today. Why was this the case? The responses collected from teachers across GSD indicate that some felt like the attempts to standardize education or measure student learning in common ways disregards the uniqueness of students. Others shared that some of what we expect students to learn, including test preparation, is meaningless to kids. Some challenged that the practices of standardizing what we teach, how we teach it, and how we assess student learning might perpetuate the transmission approach to teaching, thereby accelerating rather than disrupting the role of teachers as “drill masters” in education. Still others shared that they sometimes withheld their favorite and most effective lessons as “Sacred Cows.”

These varied responses are evidence of the unintended consequences in education today as a result of the mandates inherent in the nation’s reform agenda. If reform measures hope to be successful at providing opportunities for teachers to

collaborate to allow them to reflect upon and improve their practices, it is important to consider these consequences, and other unintended consequences, in the era of accountability. In the next section I discuss what readers and researchers might take away in terms of this inquiry and what might be learned about participation in PLCs from the experiences shared by teachers working within GSD.

Complexity of School Culture

Some of the teachers within GSD expressed their concerns about the stress and pressure they felt to show evidence of student learning and achievement. The measures used to indicate student growth across GSD included results on common assessments, benchmark tests and AIMS, along with other quantifiable measures, such as the number of Accelerated Reader tests students successfully completed. Participating teachers shared that the cultures of their PLC, and that of their entire school, are impacted when students' results on any of these measures are shared publicly and when inferences are made about which teachers may be teaching certain units or subjects best, or that individual teachers are outperforming their colleagues in some way.

Dufour and Eaker assert that creating a collaborative school culture is the single most important factor in creating an environment for PLCs to flourish. As was indicated in the review of the literature, researchers recognize this is not easily accomplished, citing challenges, difficulties, and the complexity of establishing collaborative working situations in schools. These researchers reveal

that the degree to which teachers feel positive about their work may impact the kinds of interactions they participate in or with their colleagues (Lieberman, 1986b), and that the more teachers see the value in working together, the greater their commitment to their shared collegial participation (Little, 1982).

Little (2002) suggested that the face of practice that teachers choose to make public for their own reflection and for other's learning or critique is a key factor affecting what teachers might learn from their collaborative work. This was expressed by some of the teachers in GSD, as well. Thus, the notion of trust is central to the development of positive and respectful school cultures, where teachers might feel safe and comfortable about posing questions and sharing their knowledge. This observation is important as school leaders and teachers consider the practices or conversations that might promote or inhibit collegiality, those that perpetuate positive school cultures, and those conditions that might allow for or stifle innovation and change amongst teachers. The measures that district leaders, principals and teachers establish to create trust amongst their teams will be important to foster the conditions for collegial interactions to occur that will serve to influence teachers' practices and positively impact school cultures.

Collegiality: Reciprocal or Contrived

Most of the teachers in GSD cited benefits of their participation in PLCs with their colleagues, including that they felt better equipped to address the diverse needs of their students, that many felt as if their instruction improved as a result of sharing their instructional strategies with their colleagues, or that they

benefitted when team members shared strategies to incorporate various uses of technology to support their teaching. However, most of these teachers also shared that they believed some of the work and conversations in which they participated were contrived.

As was discussed in the review of literature, Hargreaves (1991) described contrived collegiality as occurring when interactions with one another are seen as administratively regulated, where attendance is compulsory and the focus is on implementation of mandates proposed by outsiders rather than on teacher development. He cautioned that contrived collegial cultures often exist in opposition to collaborative cultures, those that foster openness, trust, and support amongst colleagues and that capitalize on teachers' collective expertise. Thus, those planning for collaborative forms of professional development would be wise to consider how to promote collegiality that is reciprocal, where teachers share their expertise in ways that prove mutually beneficial to each other and in ways that transfer to the classroom to promote higher order thinking and meaning making on the part of students.

The Not-So-Hidden Costs of Sharing One's Expertise

Some of the teachers in GSD recognized that while they have been asked to work together collaboratively, they will be evaluated and singled out based on their individual performance, in part, based on the state standardized test scores of their students. Though some acknowledged that these measures will be a positive catalyst to ensure teachers are held "accountable" for student learning, many cited

these new means to measure teacher performance as a concern that might inhibit their collaborative exchanges, especially given that no test measures the complexities of what students are learning in schools, nor measures the varied ways in which a teacher impacts or inspires their students.

Working within a system that claims to value collaboration yet privileges individual student achievement and teacher performance over cooperative success, some teachers of GSD indicated that they sometimes participated in behaviors in which they were not proud. Such behaviors included withholding their best ideas to preserve their reputations, or in preparation for being evaluated based on their students' performance.

As was discussed in the review of literature, Little (1990a) explained that one the risks of sharing ideas or expertise comes in the form of the burden of added planning and preparation as teachers try to replace the ideas that have been given away. She coined this, "the hidden cost of sharing one's expertise." Little explained that this cost involves an erosion of the corpus of ideas, methods, and materials that serves as the basis of individual reputations, which give teachers their distinctive identities and status. She observed that sometimes teachers try to sustain their individualist practices and withhold their knowledge, methods and materials in order to preserve their individual reputations.

Some of the teachers in GSD indicated that, in some settings, they have withheld their best ideas to preserve their status or reputations. Hence, key to this inquiry is the impact that linking teachers' evaluations and pay to students' scores

may have on teachers and their collaborative interactions with each other. The entire public education system is moving in this direction, and the basis of teachers' identities, status, reputations and pay are very much being linked to student achievement scores in public education across the United States today.

Historically, teachers have resisted merit pay proposals and evaluation instruments that measure their effectiveness based on students' test scores. Indeed, such initiatives appear counterintuitive to the collaborative efforts of teachers endorsed by the National Staff Development Council and the Dufours. The impact of legislation to evaluate teachers based on student scores may serve to inhibit the work of teachers and school leaders that aim to promote a culture in which teachers are collectively responsible for student success, especially given that the teacher of record is ultimately the one that assumes responsibility for student learning and progress. These changes in legislation may very well undermine the collaborative efforts of teachers. This calls for a closer look at SB 1040, the law specific to measuring the performance of teachers, principals, and schools in Arizona, based on students' results.

SB 1040

Rumored to be in the development during the data collection part of this study, in April, 2010, the House Education Committee passed the following amendment to SB1040:

On or before December 15, 2011, the State Board of Education shall establish and maintain a model framework for a teacher and principal evaluation instrument that uses quantitative data on student academic progress for between 33 and 50 percent of the evaluation outcomes.

School districts and charter schools shall use this instrument to annually evaluate individual teachers and principals beginning the school year 2012-13. (AZ Senate Bill 1040, 2011)

This bill ensures that principals and teachers will be evaluated based on students' learning and growth each year, in addition to other measures. It applies to all public schools in Arizona, including charter schools. The legislation includes provisions for school districts to implement the evaluation flexibly, and a task force has been hard at work to try to develop scenarios about what kinds of quantitative data sources might be used for these evaluation purposes.

Though SB 1040 is specific to Arizona, the movement to gauge teachers' effectiveness based on students' performance is not. The words "merit pay," "teacher evaluation based on student growth measures," and "value added measures" are gaining considerable traction and attention in education today. Current education secretary Arne Duncan supports this notion that teachers should be judged on student performance, though not solely on test scores. According to Duncan, "To somehow suggest we should not link student achievement to teacher effectiveness is like suggesting we judge sports teams without looking at the box score" (Quaid, 2009).

While the motives to evaluate teachers in this way continue to be debated, it would not be fair to suggest that even the majority of the talk is rooted in some sort of sinister plot to disempower teachers or dismantle public education altogether. Ensuring that all students have positive and engaging learning experiences in schools is important to anyone that cares about kids, and there are

plenty of stories today that depict deplorable and unfair circumstances in which our students are learning. Clearly we can strive to do better. But as we strive to do “better” it is imperative that we continue to ask key questions such as, better at what? Learning for what ends, and for what purposes? And, what do we really hope students learn as a result of the experiences we create for them? Questions like these may ensure we do not rely on test scores as a proficiency illusion, as opposed to improving student learning in other ways that extend beyond the classroom.

Unintended Consequences Perpetuated by PLCs

Teachers in GSD acknowledged that success for some teachers meant less success or failure for others. In the current era of accountability, both teachers and students are competing in ways that encourage them to try to outperform their peers. As such, some of the teachers indicated that the current system may actually impede the process of collaboration that it aims to perpetuate. Instead of fostering a culture of collegiality, it may very well propagate a competitive school culture, promoting cheating, anxiety, and deception.

Some of the unintended consequences of the era of standardization and accountability have already been identified by GSD teachers in Chapter Four, including that teachers indicated it is more difficult to integrate content and teach thematically as a result of benchmark expectations in different content areas in each quarter. Further, teachers indicated that at some schools entire master schedules have been changed to regroup students into remedial courses in ways

that might be considered tracking. Others explained that there is a lack of choice of what to learn on the part of students, and a difference in learning experiences altogether, based on the track into which students are placed.

There are other unintended consequences, especially as those reflect the practice of using students' scores as an indicator of teacher performance. Critics of evaluation based on test scores and of merit pay proposals cite concerns that such initiatives may have a negative impact on the very students with whom the authors of these kinds of legislation propose to be most concerned. Though the bulk of teachers teaching in Title I schools are incredibly committed to working with and caring for the students in their schools, such initiatives may create a disincentive for teachers to want to work within the most challenging schools and communities. Schools have unequal resources available to them, as do the students that attend them. These inequities run deep, and those fortunate enough to come from higher socioeconomic backgrounds have more resources and can choose to spend more time on schoolwork or participate in extracurricular activities, as well as having access to technology, books, and opportunities for tutoring or for traveling. As a result of these inequities, teachers or students that work the hardest may not always get the most "amazing results." If evaluations are not crafted carefully, teachers may be forced to choose between working with the most diverse student populations and teaching within the most affluent schools where students' skill levels would translate into higher test scores, and the monetary rewards may be greater. Thus, teachers might be less likely to choose

to work with students with limited English proficiency or children with special needs for fear their students would not test well. These measures may have a devastating impact on the nation's poorest and most diverse schools and communities, and the students and teachers that inhabit them. A reliance on test scores as the main indicator of performance may be setting thousands of children, their teachers, and many school districts up for failure.

Other critics of these measures are concerned that evaluating or rewarding educators based on student test scores may further exacerbate the "teach to the test" syndrome that has been shown to narrow the curriculum and dull the educational experience for students and teachers. Nichols and Berliner (2007) have written about the concerns in the ways persons continue to organize and evaluate learning. Referencing Campbell's law, an adage within social-sciences, they warn about the potential for distortion and corruption when too much value is placed on any indicator used for social decision-making. According to them, "Any time an indicator takes on too much value, it is corrupted and so are the people around it. If test scores take on too much value, educators, like all other human beings, are likely to manipulate the indicators" (Nichols and Berliner, 2007). As a result, such indicators may perpetuate competition and encourage cheating.

Teachers of GSD noted that many persons and multiple factors impact the lived experiences and "success" of students. Clearly, a one size evaluation will not fit all. Multiple data sources need to be considered to get a full, fair, and

accurate picture of student learning and teacher performance. As task forces debate the value added models and complex statistical measures that might show a school's or teacher's impact, I am hopeful persons will be mindful to consider the many factors that impact student achievement, and the varied ways teachers impact their students. Creating collaborative evaluations that avoid ranking teachers based on students' performance and instead promote a collective responsibility for learning will be important if persons hope to establish collaborative school cultures. Designing evaluation systems that consider how well teachers develop the whole child and contribute to each other's efforts may be more in step with fostering the conditions that create a positive culture within schools.

PLCs as Transformative

Dufour and Eaker contend that collaborative models of professional development hold the hope of promoting positive changes that will transform schools from the factory-model prevalent in the efficiency era, to schools that embrace ideas and assumptions that are radically different than those that have guided schools in the past. But Servage (2008) contends that what schools are to be transformed into is not really clearly articulated in the research, beyond that whatever happens in a PLC should further student learning. She asserts that when persons speak of change it is often unclear about whether the changes are reformative, intended to reshape what we already have, or truly transformative,

changing schools into something entirely new. To be sure, the purposes of learning gets little attention in much of the literature about PLCs.

Servage questions the potential of PLCs to actually be transformative in allowing teachers to think differently about education. She suggests such transformation can only occur if the school, and those working within the schools, are allowed to collectively imagine other possibilities for the school. To encourage either personal or institutional transformation, Servage believes much more open-ended dialogue would need to occur within PLCs. In a climate where accountability measures reign, such open-ended dialogue will not likely take place.

So long as data driven decision making and focus on student learning are the exclusive concentration of collaborative work – and this concentration is almost entirely unchallenged in mainstream school improvement literature – we cannot expect much time or energy to be dedicated to the sort of critical reflection [required for transformative learning to take place]. (Servage, 2008, p. 70)

Though there are many positive benefits of teachers working together in PLCs, a review of the literature and the stories of teachers in GSD indicate that there are many problems within education that never get addressed, largely because it is incredibly difficult to address them. These problems include that: teachers can often improve students' scores on standardized tests but cannot seem to educate the public about the narrowness of the learning represented therein, teachers can streamline curriculum but cannot challenge its content or the stifling quantity of what is mandated, or that teachers can implore and differentiate pedagogy to reach more diverse student populations but cannot ameliorate the

effects of poverty and racism in their larger communities (Servage, 2008). Thus, the potential for PLCS to be the catalyst for empowering teachers or for transforming schools is complicated by the fact that many of the systemic problems of education remain outside of the scope of teachers' improvement efforts (Servage, 2008).

Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (2011) have recently challenged that the vision of practice that underlies the nation's reform agenda requires teachers to rethink their own practices, construct new classroom roles and expectations about student outcomes, and teach in ways that they have never taught before. They maintain that this will require that teachers adopt a new vision of practice and unlearn the practices and beliefs about students and instruction that have long dominated the teaching profession.

The experiences shared by the teachers of GSD indicate we may need to go even further, allowing teachers time for critical reflection to explore and debate the meaning behind what they do and about the worth or value of that which is taught or being implemented. Allowing space for teachers to think about questions posed by critical and cultural theorists may promote this critical reflection. Such questions include: What is the fundamental purpose of schools? What should be taught in schools? What counts as evidence of student's learning? What happens when curriculum and testing are standardized, when teachers regularly compare results of student learning, and when schools respond to students learning systematically? Whose interests might be served by the policies,

practices, and external mandates in education today? What “results” are we comparing? And, why are we comparing in the first place? Posing these questions may allow teachers the space and opportunity to reflect about their participation in PLCs, on the practices inherent in standardization and accountability, and on the policies and processes at work in schools that may serve to empower or disenfranchise them. Such reflection is necessary if we hope teachers will feel a deep sense of purpose about their collaborative work and participate in ways that allow for positive changes to occur.

Re-conceptualizing the Work of Teachers

Currently, PLCs are replacing many traditional professional development approaches, which “seat expertise outside the teaching field itself, within a learning community structure designed to foreground critique, build, and enhance practitioner expertise” (Wood, 2007, p. 2). Lying at the very heart of professional learning communities, then, is a re-conceptualization of teachers’ work – where teachers operate with the autonomy, authority and responsibility to change the culture of their workplace and improve student learning. At a deeper level though, this type of teacher learning depends on teachers taking more control over their work, sharing and releasing tacit knowledge and expertise, developing critical judgment and assuming further responsibility for student learning (Wood, 2007). This may involve a reconstruction of teachers’ roles, responsibilities, identity and agency – all very complicated as this reconstruction often conflicts

with deeply entrenched norms and ideas inherent in school culture and within hierarchical and bureaucratic policy in schools (Wood, 2007).

Wood maintains that any re-conceptualization of teachers' work, roles, and responsibilities is a particularly difficult agenda to pursue given the pressures of accountability and the socialization of compliance present within "schooling." This re-conceptualization may very well run counter to a competing agenda where teachers are more likely rewarded for conformity than for critical dialogue, inquiry, and innovative ideas (Wood, 2007; Grumet, 1988).

One thing is certain, as evidenced by reform initiatives of the past; prompting sustainable cultural changes in schooling is very difficult. Even with ample resources of time, money, and support, school reform initiatives, including professional development, often fail to make a significant impact in the classroom (Fullan, 2006). Securing time for successful collaborative professional development in the future likely will involve providing occasions for teacher to reflect critically on their practice in ways that will simultaneously promote knowledge and challenge their beliefs about content, pedagogy, and learning.

Recommendations for Future Research

Several topics emerged throughout this inquiry as warranting more research to understand them. Given the newness of some these topics or the complexity in grasping them, research does not adequately address the following as they might impact teachers, their practices, or the collaborative interactions in which they participate: 1.) the implications of the adoption of national, common

core standards, 2.) the implications and complexity of understanding teachers' identity, 3.) the factors that promote competitive versus cooperative school cultures, 4.) the impact on the relationships between students and teachers when teachers are evaluated based on the performance of their students, 5.) what systematic interventions and opportunities really look like in schools, and 6.) other potential benefits of working in PLCs outside of increasing student achievement. These topics are briefly examined, next.

Implications of National Common Core Standards

In an effort to promote equitable educational experiences, movements to establish national curricular standards have found new footing in the current era of reform. The proposal gaining the most attention has been the Common Core Standards Initiative, launched by the National Governor's Association and the Council of Chief State School Officer in April, 2009. As of December, 2010, over 40 states had adopted the national common core standards, including Arizona. Districts across the state, including GSD, are currently making plans to roll out the standards which will be assessed for the first time in 2014.

Establishing national or state-wide core curriculum frameworks are intended to promote equity and create quality educational experiences for students, but promoting rigor and raising standards while not equalizing resources poses real challenges to teachers today. The implementation of the Common Core Standards across the country will likely perpetuate further comparisons of student performance across schools, districts and states. As a result, such

competition may propagate instruction that is driven by standardized, norm-referenced, multiple-choice tests. With more focus on norm-referenced testing, an unintended consequence of the implementation of national standards may be that they serve to narrow the curriculum, pressing teachers to use pedagogical practices geared toward memorization and rote learning. Given the newness of these national standards, little research exists on what the effects of this most recent initiative to standardize what students know will be. However, researchers would be mindful to study how this “standardization” impacts teachers, their teaching practices and their collaborative interactions with each other – especially given most of the states across the US have adopted these standards, and given most teachers will be evaluated based on how their students demonstrate an understanding of them.

Implications of Teachers’ Identity

Long ago, Little acknowledged the difficulty of understanding the collaborative exchanges of teachers, indicating that teacher talk both conveys and constructs what it means to teach and to be a teacher. Thus, it is embedded with values and rooted in teachers’ concepts of identity. Many researchers have tried to unpack this notion of identity, especially as professional identity impacts teachers’ practices based on their sense of ethics about how to best support the students under their care. Further research about what happens when teachers do not share a sense of professional identity will be important if researchers hope to better understand the barriers to the collaboration process.

Factors that Promote Competitive or Cooperative Cultures

As was indicated in the introduction, Barth noted that when the culture of schools reflects competition, fear, and suspicion, these qualities pervade the entire school. He found that in competitive cultures, teachers began to guard their tricks and conceal what they do from other colleagues. In the review of literature, Hargreaves, too, cautioned persons from allowing competitive cultures to take root, defining those as places where teachers compete with one another for power, status and resources. Thus, unpacking the conditions that perpetuate competitive cultures has huge implications for persons who seek to understand teachers' collaboration in context. The demand to achieve short terms gains may impede the creation of effective and autonomous learning communities, and the focus on certain "results" may negatively impact the dynamics of the PLC. Clearly, the practice of publicly comparing students' results warrants further understanding, and further research is necessary to understand the factors at work that may promote or inhibit collaborative school cultures and teacher learning – causing teachers to reach out to one another or be defensive and withdraw altogether.

Teachers' Relationships with Students

The recent shift from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning, questioning not whether something was taught by teachers but whether it was learned by students, has been significant. This "results" orientation requires that teachers constantly seek evidence and indicators of student learning. This change largely reflects the efficiency movement of Taylor's time, where persons were

evaluated by quantitative numbers based on what was produced or in the number of sales, etc.

However, students are not widgets, and attempts to quantify and measure the impact of teachers based on how students perform adds a whole different dynamic to the teacher and student relationship. We have barely scratched the surface of understanding this, and much more research is warranted before persons can truly understand the impact this change will have on the dynamics of the relationships between teachers and their students, when students' results are used as the main indicator of teacher performance.

“Systematic” Interventions and Opportunities for Enrichment

Current reform measures include that schools adopt pyramids of intervention to support those students that have fallen through the cracks of the school system. These interventions are rooted in good intentions to ensure equitable learning experiences for students, in many cases to provide opportunities for these students to receive more support. However, educators would be wise to pay attention to them. Systematic interventions and opportunities for enrichment may very well be paving the way to improved learning opportunities for students, or they may be further perpetuating a long established system of tracking, stratification and discrimination – especially if students are denied opportunities to participate in electives as a result of their required participation in intervention or remediation courses of study.

Other Benefits of Participation in PLCs

With accountability measures focusing attention on students' results, far less emphasis has been placed on other benefits of working in PLCs, including the changing practices of teachers and the development of a sense of belonging and collegiality amongst teachers that promote an emotionally healthy workplace. Because teaching demands so much from teachers, supporting and investing in their development as persons may be the best way to promote teacher learning and create positive and healthy school cultures. Further research about what school reform efforts with this focus might look like is important if we hope to support teachers in ways that allow them to be their best selves and work efficaciously in the teaching profession.

Final Thoughts

Popular literature champions that PLCs call for critical reflection. Critical reflection includes questioning the taken for granted assumptions and schooling and teaching practices and imagining alternatives for the purposes of changing conditions (Freire, 2004; Achinstein, 2002). This inquiry revealed that teachers' reflection across Green School District largely focused on the beliefs and practices specific to the immediate daily work of teaching. While improving pedagogical skills has a positive impact on teaching and learning, an exclusive focus on these skills may not promote the critical reflection required to understand schools, and PLCs, as complex social and political entities. Truly critical studies of education and reform likely need to go beyond the questions about best

practices, “results,” and how we teach efficiently and effectively in order to allow spaces for teachers to rethink and recreate school cultures, and dismantle some of the barriers that tend to keep the practices and best ideas of teachers, private.

In the current climate of accountability, teachers are charged with the responsibility of improving teaching and learning in public schools today. A comprehensive look at the literature reveals that many of the systemic problems of education remain largely outside of the scope of teachers’ improvement efforts. But equally important, the literature reveals that when the conditions, culture, practices and policies at work in school perpetuate competition, teachers may try to sustain individualist practices as they guard their tricks and conceal what they do from other colleagues (Barth, 2006), or withhold their stores of knowledge, methods and materials in order to preserve their individual reputations (Little, 1990a). This was true for some of the teachers in Green School District. Researchers would be wise to consider the implications of teachers’ identity and reputation situated within the complexity of public school settings. These acts to preserve one’s reputation or identity are not likely selfish behaviors, but will be better understood if persons afford attention to the broad cultural context of behaviors, events, and the meanings teachers assign to those behaviors and events throughout their work.

The present era of accountability has promoted unprecedented competition across and within public schools today. Under the guise of collaboration to improve student achievement, reform initiatives may be perpetuating the

conditions for the perfect storm as teachers are expected to work together collaboratively in PLCs to share their resources and ideas to ensure the learning of all students, while measures of students' learning will be used to individually evaluate teachers and determine merit pay. Teachers, and their collaborative interactions with each other, are at the very center of this potential storm.

Given the demands of teaching, educators would be hard-pressed to meet all of the expectations if working in isolation. Clearly, there are many pluses to collaborative forms of professional development and many examples of educational excellence as teachers work together in the high-stakes era of accountability. The questions I have tried to raise as a result of this inquiry are important to allow teachers to consider the ideological and epistemological practices they may be accepting and perpetuating as they work in the collaborative learning communities. Equally important, I hope the questions I have raised reveal the complexity involved in defining what quality teaching and effective teachers look like, as well as challenge the grand narrative at work that suggests good schooling can be measured by results on standardized test scores. It is imperative that researchers continue to challenge and reveal the practices and policies inherent in reform initiatives rooted within measures of accountability, as has been cited as important by Apple:

It is unfortunately all too usual that the most widely used measure of the "success" of school reforms are the results of standardized tests. This simply will not do. We need constantly to ask what reforms do to schools as a whole and to each of their participants including teachers, students, administrators, community members, local activities, and so on. Without asking these questions, we are apt to be satisfied with surface changes that

offer superficially positive results while actually often making problems significantly worse in the long run. (Apple in McNeil, 2000)

One of the teachers in Green School District shared that as a result of repetitive testing, her students had practiced so hard at not caring that when it came time for the high stakes AIMS test to begin, they indicated they were indifferent about their performance or “results.” This is concerning for both students and teachers. Olsen (2009) has indicated that wounds of schooling do not belong to students alone as teachers and principals share similar feelings of pressure and disempowerment within public schools today. As proponents of educational reform initiatives continue to call for collaborative forms of professional development, we would be wise to listen to the perspectives of teachers to ensure the pressures inherent in the era of accountability do not become obstacles working against the establishment of positive teacher communities and collaborative school cultures. By affording attention to the emic issues, those that involve the concerns and values of teachers working in schools today, we might become more effective at combatting the growing deprofessionalization of teaching, and teachers, in the public education system.

REFERENCES

- Achinstein, B. (2002). Conflict amid community: The micropolitics of teacher collaboration. *Teachers College Record*, (104)3, 421-55.
- Adler, S., & Goodman, J. (1986). *Preparing teachers of history: Developing a critical consciousness*. Paper presented at the College and University Faculty Assembly of the National Council for the Social Studies meeting, New York, NY.
- Aguirre, J.M. (2002). Teaching high school mathematics in a climate of reform: The influence and interaction of teachers' beliefs and department culture on instructional decision-making and practice. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of California, Berkeley.
- AllthingsPLC. (2011). Retrieved May 20, 2011 from <http://www.allthingsplc.info>
- Amrein, A. L., & Berliner, D. C. (2007). High-stakes testing, uncertainty, and student learning. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, (10)18. Retrieved May 20, 2011 from <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v10n18/>.
- Apple, M. (1996). *Cultural politics and education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Apple, M. (2006). *Educating the "right" way: Markets, standards, God, and inequality*. (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Apple, M. (2004). *Ideology and curriculum*. (3rd ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Apple, M. (1993). Rebuilding hegemony: Education, equality, and the new right. In D. L. Dworkin & L. G. Roman (Eds.), *Views beyond the border country: Raymond Williams and cultural politics*. New York: Routledge.
- Apple, M. (2003). *The state and the politics of knowledge*. New York: Routledge.
- Apple, M., & Beane, J. (1995). *Democratic schools*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Aronowitz, S. & Giroux, H. (1993). *Education still under siege*. (2nd ed.). Westport, CN: Bergin & Garvey.
- AZ Senate Bill 1040. (2010). Retrieved May 1, 2011 from <http://www.azleg.gov/legtext/49leg/2r/bills/sb1040h.pdf>.

- Barone, T. (2000). *Aesthetics, politics, and educational inquiry: Essays and examples*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.
- Barone, T., & Eisner, E. (1997). Arts-based educational research. In R. Jaeger (Ed.), *Complementary methods for research in education*. (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.
- Barone, T. (2008, May). *Teachers' responses to external mandates*. Lecture: DCI 701, Curriculum Theory and Practice. Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ.
- Barth, R., (2006). Improving relationships within the schoolhouse. *Educational Leadership*, 63(6), 8-13.
- Barth, R., Dufour, R., Dufour, R., Eaker, R., Eason-Watkins, B., Fullan, M., Lezotte, L., Reeves, D., & Saphier, J. (2005). *On common ground: The power of professional learning communities*. Bloomington, Indiana: Solution Tree.
- Beck, L. (1999). Metaphors of educational community: An analysis of images that reflect and influence scholarship and practice. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 35(1), 13-45.
- Behrens, J., & Smith, M. (1996). Data and data analysis. In D. C. Berliner & R. C. Calfee (Eds.), *Handbook of educational psychology* (pp. 945-989). New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Berliner, D. C., & Biddle, B. J. (1995). *The manufactured crisis*. New York: Addison-Wesley.
- Berliner, D. C. & Calfee, R. C. (1996). *Handbook of educational psychology*. New York and London: Macmillan.
- Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Stoll, L., Thomas, S., & Wallace, M. (2005). Creating and sustaining professional learning communities. Research Report Number 637. London: General Teaching Council for England, Department for Education and Skills.
- Bourdieu, P. (2003). *Outline of a theory of practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Brady, A. L. (2008). Effects of standardized testing on teachers' emotions, pedagogy and professional interactions with others. Retrieved January 29, 2011 from <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/docview/304374595/fulltextPDF?accountid=4485>
- Brownell, G., Haney, J., & Sternberg, L. (1997). *Developing and implementing a master of education in classroom technology*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University.
- Bruner, J. (1986). *Actual minds, possible worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bryk, A., Camburn, E., & Louis, K. (1999). Professional community in Chicago elementary schools: Facilitating factors and organizational consequences. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 35, 751-781.
- Bullough, R. V. Jr. (2007). Professional learning communities and the eight-year study. *Educational Horizons*, (85)3, 168-180.
- Calkins, A., Guenther, W., Belfiore, G., & Lash, D. (2007). *The turnaround challenge: Why America's best opportunity to dramatically improve student achievement lies in our worst-performing schools*. Boston: Mass Insight Education & Research Institute.
- Casanova, U., Berliner, D. C., & Powell, J. H. (Eds.) (1994). *Readings in educational research: Cognitive strategies*. Washington, DC: National Education Association.
- Clandinin, D., & Connelly, F. (2000). *Narrative Inquiry*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Connelly, F., & Clandinin, D. (1990). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, 19, 2-14.
- Cordingley, P., Bell, M., Rundell, B. & Evans, D. (2003). The impact of collaborative CPD on classroom teaching and learning. In: *Research Evidence in Education Library*. London: EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London.
- Craig, C. (2004). The dragon in school backyards: The influence of mandated testing on school contexts and educators' narrative knowing. *Teachers college record*, 106(9), 1229-1257.

- Cronbach, L. (1982). *Designing evaluations of educational and social programs*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Darling-Hammond, L., Chung Wei, R., Andree, A., Richardson, N., & Orphanos, S. (2009). *Professional learning in the learning profession: A status report on teacher development in the United States and abroad*. Stanford University: National Staff Development Council.
- Darling-Hammond, L., & McLaughlin, M. W. (2011). Policies that support professional development in an era of reform. *Kappan*, 92(6), 81-92.
- Dewey, J. (1916/1966). *Democracy and education. An introduction to the philosophy of education*. New York: Free Press. (Original work published 1916)
- Dimitriadis, G. & Kamberelis, G. (2006). *Theory for education*. New York: Routledge.
- DuFour, R. (2004a). Leading edge: Culture shift doesn't occur overnight – or without conflict. *Journal of Staff Development*, 25(4).
- DuFour, R. (2004b). What is a "professional learning community?" *Educational Leadership*, 61(8), 6-11.
- Dufour, R., & Dufour, R. (2009, March). *Creating Professional Learning Communities*. Conference at Desert Willow Conference Center, Phoenix, AZ.
- Dufour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker, R., & Karhanek, G. (2004). *Whatever it takes: How a professional learning community responds when kids don't learn*. Bloomington: Solution Tree.
- DuFour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker, R., & Many, T. (2006). *Learning by doing: A handbook for professional learning communities at work*. Bloomington: Solution Tree.
- Dufour, R., & Eaker, R. (1998). *Professional learning communities at work: Best practices for enhancing student achievement*. Bloomington: Solution Tree.
- Eaker, R., DuFour, R., & DuFour, R. (2002). *Getting Started: Reculturing Schools to Become Professional Learning Communities*. Bloomington: Solution Tree.

- Eisner, E. W. (1983). The art and craft of teaching. *Educational Leadership*, 40(4), 4-13.
- Eisner, E. (1979). *The educational imagination: On the design and evaluation of school programs*. Columbus: Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Elmore, R. (2003). *Knowing the right thing to do: School improvement and performance-based accountability*. Washington, DC: NGA Center for Best Practices.
- Erb, T. (1995). Teamwork in middle school education. In H. G. Garner (Ed.), *Teamwork models and experience in education* (pp. 175-198). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Erickson F. (1986). Qualitative methods in research on teaching. In M. Wittrock (Ed.), *Handbook of research in teaching* (3rd ed.), (pp. 119-161). New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.
- Fielding, M. (1999). Radical collegiality: Affirming teaching as an inclusive professional practice. *Australian Educational Researcher*, 26(2).
- Fine, G. A. (1988). Letting off steam? Redefining a restaurant's work environment. In M. O. Jones, M. D. Moore, & R. C. Snyder (Eds.), *Inside organizations: Understanding the human dimension* (pp. 119-127). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Foucault, M. (1973). About the beginnings of the hermeneutics of the self. In J.R. Carrette (Ed.), *Religion and culture*. London: Routledge.
- Freire, P. (2004). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, Inc.
- Fullan, M. G. (1993). The complexity of the change process. In *Change forces: Probing the depth of educational reform* (pp. 19-41). Philadelphia, PA: Falmer Press.
- Fullan, M. (2006). Leading professional learning. *School Administrator*, 63(10), 10-14.
- Giroux, H. (1988). *Teachers as intellectuals: Toward a critical pedagogy of learning*. New York: Bergin & Garvey.
- Giroux, H. (2009). The Corporate Stranglehold on Education. Retrieved on May 20, 2011 from <http://www.counterpunch.org/giroux09082009.html>

- Goddard, Y., Goddard, R., & Tschannen-Moran, M. (2007). A theoretical and empirical investigation of teacher collaboration for school improvement and student achievement in public elementary schools. *Teachers College Record, 109*(4), 877-896.
- Goodman, J. (1988). The disenfranchisement of elementary teachers and strategies for resistance. *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision, 3*(3), 201-220.
- Goodman, J. (1992). *Elementary schooling for critical democracy*. Albany: University of New York Press.
- Goodson, I. (1995). The story so far: Personal knowledge and the political. *Qualitative studies in education, 8*(1), 89-98.
- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the prison notebooks*. Hoare, Q. & Smith, G. N. (Eds. & Trans.) New York.
- Grumet, M. (1988). *Bitter milk: Women and teaching*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Hanushek, E. A., Rivkin, S. G., & Kaini, J. F. (2005). Teachers, school, and academic achievement. *Econometrica, 73*(2), 417-458.
- Hargreaves, A. (1991). Contrived collegiality: The micropolitics of teacher collaboration. In J. Blase (Ed.), *The politics of life in schools* (pp. 46-72). New York: Sage Publications.
- Hargreaves, A. (1992). Cultures of teaching: A focus for change. In A. Hargreaves & M. Fullan (Eds.), *Understanding teacher development* (pp. 216-240). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Hargreaves, A. (1994). *Changing teachers, changing times: Teachers' work and culture in the postmodern age*. London: Cassell.
- Helsby, G. & McCulloch, G. (1998). *Teachers and the national curriculum*. London: Cassell.
- Hirsch, S. (2009). Creating effective professional learning systems to bolster teaching quality and student achievement. In Darling-Hammond, L., Chung Wei, R., Andree, A., Richardson, N., & Orphanos, S. (2009). *Professional learning in the learning profession: A status report on teacher development in the United States and abroad*. Stanford University: National Staff Development Council.

- Hord, S. (1986). A synthesis of research on organizational collaboration. *Educational Leadership*, 43(5), 22-27.
- Hord, S. (1997). Professional learning communities: What are they and why are they important? *Issues about Change*, 6(1).
- Hughes, T. & Kritsonis, W. (2006). A national perspective: An exploration of professional learning communities and the impact on school improvement efforts. Retrieved September 8, 2007, from: <http://64.233.167.104/search?q=cache:TMrNqhxWcKAJ:www.lpig.org/artman/uploads/hughes>
- Hughes, T. & Kritsonis, W. (2007). Professional learning communities and the positive effects on achievement: A national agenda for school improvement. Retrieved August 12, 2008, from <http://www.allthingsplc.info/pdf/articles/plcandthepositiveeffects.pdf>
- Ihara, C. (1988). Collegiality as a professional virtue. In A. F. (Ed.), *Professional Ideals* (pp. 56-65). Belmont: Wadsworth.
- Jarzabkowski, L. (1999). *Commitment and compliance: Curious bedfellows in teacher collaboration*. Paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education and New Zealand Association for Research in Education joint Conference (AARE-NZARE), Melbourne, Australia.
- Jarzabkowski, L. (2001). *The social dimensions of teacher collegiality*. Paper presented at the annual conference of the Australian Association of Research in Education, Perth, Australia.
- Joyce, B. & Showers, B. (1988) *Student Achievement Through Staff Development*. New York: Longman.
- Kilbourn, B. (1999). Fictional theses. *Educational Researcher*, 28(9), 27-32.
- Killion, J. (2006). Teacher meetings do not make a community. *T3 Teachers Teaching Teachers*. Oxford, OH: National Staff Development Council.
- Kridel, C. & Bullough, R. V. Jr. (2007). *Stories of the eight-year study: Reexamining secondary education in America*. Albany: State University Press of New York.

- Kruse, S., Louis, K. S., & Bryk, A. (1995) Let's build teachers' professional community. Retrieved August 12, 2002, from *WCER Highlights*, 7(1).
Web site:
http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/publications/WCXER_Highlights/Vol.7_No.1_Spring_1995/Teachers_prof_community.html
- Lambert, L. (2003). *Leadership capacity for lasting school improvement*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Lanier, J. (1979). Collaboration session, discussion, remarks. In G. E. Hall, S. M. Hord, and G. Brown (Eds.), *Exploring issues in teacher education: Questions for future research*. Austin: Research and Development Center for Teacher Education, The University of Texas.
- Lather, P. (2003). Issues of validity in openly ideological research: Between a rock and a soft place. In Y. Lincoln & W. K. Denzin (Eds.), *Turning points in qualitative research* (pp. 185-215). Altemire Press.
- Lavie, J. M. (2006). Academic discourses on school-based teacher collaboration: Revising the arguments. *Educational Administration Quarterly* 42(5), 773-805.
- Levine, T. H., & Marcus, A. S. (2009). How the structure and focus of teachers' collaborative activities facilitate and constrain teacher learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education*. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2009.03.001
- Lieberman, A. (1986a). Collaborative research: Working with, not working on. *Educational Leadership*, 43(5), 28-32.
- Lieberman, A. (1986b). Collaborative work. *Educational Leadership*, 43(5), 4-8.
- Little, J. (1982). Norms of collegiality and experimentation: Workplace conditions of school success. *American Educational Research Journal*, 19(3), 325-340.
- Little, J. (1990a). The persistence of privacy: Autonomy and initiative in teachers' professional relations. *Teachers College Record*, 91(4), 509-536.
- Little, J. (1990b). Teachers as colleagues. In A. Lieberman (Ed.), *Schools as Collaborative cultures: Creating the future now*. Bristol, PA: Falmer Press.

- Little, J. (2002). Locating learning in teachers' communities of practice; opening up problems of analysis in records of everyday work. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 18(7), 917-946.
- Little, J. (2003). Inside teacher community: Representations of classroom practices. *Teachers College Record*, 105(6), 913-945.
- Lortie, D. (1975). *Schoolteacher - A sociological study*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Louis, K., & Marks, H. (1998). Does professional learning community affect the classroom? Teachers' work and student experiences in restructuring schools. *American Journal of Education*, 106(4), 532-575.
- McLaren, P., & Farahmandpur, R. (2005). *Teaching against global capitalism and the new imperialism: A critical pedagogy*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.
- McLaughlin, M. W. & Talbert, J. E. (1993). *Contexts that matter for teaching and learning*. Stanford, CA: Center for Research on the Context of Secondary School Teaching, Stanford University.
- McMahon, A. (2000). *Managing teachers' stress to enhance student learning*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, April.
- McNeil, L. (2000). *Contradictions of school reform: Educational costs of standardized testing*. London, UK: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Miles, M. & Huberman, M. (1994). *An expanded sourcebook: Qualitative data analysis* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Mitchell, A. (1997). Teacher identity: A key to increased collaboration. *Action in Teacher Education*, 19, 1-14.
- Morrow, S., & Smith, M. (2000). Qualitative research for counseling psychology. In S. Brown & R. W. Lent (Eds.), *Handbook of counseling psychology* (3rd ed.), pp. 199-230. New York: Wiley.
- National Staff Development Council. (2011). Retrieved January 16, 2011 from: <http://www.nsd.org/>
- Newmann, F. M., & Wehlage, G. G. (1995). *Successful school restructuring: A report to the public and educators*. Madison, Wisconsin: CORS.

- Nias, J. (1995). Postmodernity and teachers' work and culture. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 11(3), 307-312.
- Nias, J. (1998). Why teachers need their colleagues: A developmental perspective. In A. Hargreaves, A. Lieberman, M. Fullan, & D. Hopkins (Eds.), *International handbook of educational change*. Dordrecht: Luwever Academic Publishers.
- Nichols, S., & Berliner, D. (2007). *Collateral damage: How high-stakes testing corrupts America's schools*. Cambridge: Harvard Education Press.
- Olson, Kirsten. (2009). *Wounded by school: Recapturing the joy in learning and standing up to old school culture*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- O'Neill, J. and Conzemius, A. (2006). *The power of SMART goals: Using goals to improve student learning*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.
- Phillips, D., & Burbules, N. (2000). *Postpositivism and educational research*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Piazza, P., McNeil, K. L., & Hittinger, J. (2009, April). *Developing a voluntary teacher community: The role of professional development, collaborative learning and conflict*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA.
- Polkinghorne, D. (1995). Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 9, 5-23.
- Quaid, L. (2009). Teachers should be judged on student performance. Retrieved June 10, 2009 from <http://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/49297>
- Ravitch, D. (2010). The Myth of Charter Schools. Retrieved April 26, 2011 from <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2010/nov/11/myth-charter-schools/?page=2>
- Rius (1976). *Marx for beginners*. New York: Random House, Inc.
- Rorty, R. (1980). Idealism, holism, and the paradox of knowledge. In P. A. Schilpp (ed.), *The Philosophy of Brand Blanshard* (pp. 719–38), La Salle, Ill: Open Court.
- Rorty, R. (1982). *The consequences of pragmatism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- Rosenholtz, S. (1989). *Teachers' workplace: The social organization of schools*. New York: Longman.
- Rosenholtz, S., & Simpson, C. (1990). Workplace conditions and the rise and fall of teachers' commitment. *Sociology of Education*, 63, 241-257.
- Schmoker, M. (2006). *Results now: How we can achieve unprecedented improvements in teaching and learning*. Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Senge, P. (1990). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization*. New York: Doubleday.
- Servage, L. (2008). Critical and transformative practices in professional learning communities. *Teacher Education Quarterly*.
- Servage, L. (2006-07). Making space for critical reflection in professional learning communities. *Education Canada*, 47(1), 14-17.
- Shachar, H., & Schmuelevitz, H. (1997). Implementing cooperative learning, teacher collaboration and teachers' sense of efficacy in heterogeneous junior high schools. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 22, 53-72.
- Shulman, L. (1997). Disciplines of inquiry in education: A new overview. In R. M. Jaeger (Ed.), *Complementary methods for research in education* (2nd ed., pp. 401-414). Washington, DC: American Educational Research Education.
- Smylie, M. (1995). Teacher learning in the workplace. In T. R. Guskey & M. Huberman (Eds.), *Professional development in education: New paradigms and practices*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Smyth, J. (1991). International perspectives on teacher collegiality: A labour process discussion based on the concept of teachers' work. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 12(3), 323-346.
- Spradley, J. (1979). *The Ethnographic Interview*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.
- Stake, R. (1997). Case study methods in educational research: Seeking sweet water. In R. M. Jaeger (Ed.), *Complementary methods for research in education* (2nd ed., pp. 401-414). Washington DC: American Educational Research Education.

- Stiggins, R. (2002). Assessment crisis: The absence of assessment for learning. *Phi Delta Kapan*, 83(10), 758-765.
- Stoll, L., Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Wallace, M., & Thomas, S. (2006). Professional learning communities: A review of the literature. *Journal of Educational Change*, 7(4), 221-258.
- Stoll, L. & Fink, D. (1996). *Changing our schools: Linking school effectiveness and school improvement*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Stoll, L. & Myers, K. (1998). *No quick fixes: Perspectives on schools in difficulty*. London: Falmer Press.
- Supovitz, J., & Christman, J. (2003). Developing communities of instructional practice: Lessons for Cincinnati and Philadelphia. *CPRE Policy Briefs*, pp. 1-0. Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania.
- Taylor, R. (1969). *Basic principles of curriculum and instruction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Tschannen-Moran, M. (2001). Collaboration and the need for trust. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 39, 308-331.
- Tyack, D. & Cuban, L. (1995). *Tinkering toward utopia: A century of public school reform*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- US Department of Education. (2011). Policy Overview. Retrieved April 20, 2011 from <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/>
- Vescio, V., Ross, D., & Adams, A. (2008). A review of research on the impact of professional learning communities on teaching practice and student learning. *Teacher and Teacher Education*, 24(1), 80-91.
- Wolcott, H. (1997). Ethnographic research in education. In R. Jaeger (Ed.), *Complementary methods for research in education*. (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.
- Wood, D. (2007). Teachers' learning communities: Catalyst for change or a new infrastructure for the status quo? *Teachers College Record*, 109(3), 699-739.
- Woods, P., Jeffrey, B., Troman, G. & Boyle, M. (1997). *Restructuring schools, reconstructing teachers: Responding to change in a primary school*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Woods, P. (1984). The meaning of staffroom humour. In A. Hargreaves & P. Woods (Eds.), *Classrooms and staffrooms* (pp. 190-202). Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

APPENDIX A

INTRODUCTION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

Research Title: Collaboration in context: Investigating the impact of the present era of standardization and accountability on teachers participating in professional learning communities

August 11, 2009

Dear _____:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Thomas Barone in the Mary Lou Fulton College of Education at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to investigate how teachers, working in professional learning communities, are responding to the current focus on standardization, assessment, and accountability. By researching this topic I hope to reveal the varied experiences of teachers working within professional learning communities and understand what impact the present era of accountability is having on teachers' relationships with their colleagues (including teachers and administrators), their satisfaction with their profession, and the culture of their schools.

I am inviting your participation, which will involve an initial semi-structured interview (about 1 to 3 hours per participant) and a follow up interview(s) (expected to require about 1 to 4 hours per participant). As a participant in this inquiry, you have the right not to answer any question, and to stop interviews at any time.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation. And although there is no direct benefit to you, your participation in this inquiry may afford me the opportunity to call attention to the complexity of the problems inherent in education today, and raise questions about how educators are being asked to address such challenges. Such critical scholarship may hold the possibility of critiquing the educational practices in the era of accountability, and allow educators the opportunity to imagine it otherwise. Ultimately, I hope to pursue this inquiry so that the quality of teachers' collaborative experiences can be improved, and the lives of both students and teachers enhanced across schools today.

Your responses will be confidential. Though the results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications, your name will not be used. Further, though the demographics of the district and school(s) will be established in the dissertation, the names of the district and school(s) will not be revealed.

I would like to audiotape the interview(s). The interview(s) will not be recorded without your permission. Please let me know if you do not want the interview to be taped; you also can change your mind after the interview starts, just let me know. All names will be withheld from audiotapes and transcriptions and will not be made available to district or university personnel. Further, audiotapes will be destroyed as soon as the transcriptions are typed.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact me, or Dr. Barone, by email or phone at: kbenson@asu.edu or 480-659-2178, and barone@asu.edu or 480-965-3924. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788.

Thank you so much for your time!

Karen Benson
PhD Student, Curriculum and Instruction, Curriculum Studies
Arizona State University