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PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHER PROFESSIONALISM AND AUTONOMY WITHIN A COLLABORATIVE SCHOOL CULTURE

by

Sukinah Ali Al Ramel

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology
Western Michigan University
December 2019

Doctoral Committee:

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Nancy Mansberger, Ph.D.
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to Almighty Allah for giving me strength and ability to complete my doctorate program. Although this degree took much sacrifice, time, and energy, I am grateful that I have learned much personally and professionally. This dissertation is not a destination, but merely a step along the way on my journey of being a lifelong learner, lifelong leader.

I would like to acknowledge everyone who played an important role in my academic accomplishments. First of all, my parents who supported me with love and understanding. Dad, you are truly a source of encouragement, which gave me the strength to keep striving until I reached the finish line. Mom, thank you for your thoughtful prayers throughout my dissertation journey. I know in my heart that you all were rooting for my success.

I also would like to thank my husband, Abdulwahed, who endured this process with unwavering support and patience. His gracious willingness to pick up any extra responsibilities I left behind was what allowed me to complete this degree. To my kids Zahra and Yossef, I really appreciate your patience, understanding, and words of encouragement as I was frequently at library working on my dissertation. This truly was a team effort. Without you, this journey could not have been possible.

I also wish to acknowledge and thank my sisters, in particular, my sister Dr. Fatemah Al Ramel. Our education has been a shared journey, from elementary school to earning our Ph.Ds in Educational Leadership from Western Michigan University. We always have been a team and will always keep supporting each other.

Acknowledgments - continued

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Patricia Reeves, for her continuous support of my study and research, for her patience, motivation, enthusiasm, and for her immense knowledge. She helped me gain the confidence I needed to take full ownership of my research and see myself as a scholar. She also helped me clarify my goals and recognize that I can achieve them.

Besides my advisor, I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Nancy Mansberger and Dr. Lynn Nations-Johnson, for their encouragement, insightful comments, and suggestions. The time and feedback they have given to my project is greatly appreciated. In addition, I would like to extend my thanks to my writing coaches, specifically Gari Voss, Lee Kirk, and Mary Ebejer, for their invaluable help and encouragement. They were always available for extra assistance whenever I needed it. I would not have been able to complete my dissertation without them.

Finally, I want to express my thanks to those principals and teachers who volunteered to participate in my study. Their willingness to share their time, ideas, and insights was invaluable. I wish them all well as they pursue their careers in education.

Sukinah Ali Al Ramel

PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHER PROFESSIONALISM AND AUTONOMY WITHIN A COLLABORATIVE SCHOOL CULTURE

Sukinah Ali Al Ramel, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 2019

This instrumental multiple case study examines the actual activities and behaviors of elementary school principals who are known for building a collaborative school culture. The principals in these case studies were nominated by key informants as leaders who empower and mobilize teachers to grow professionally and interdependently in ways that enhance self-direction and motivation through reflecting on their own practices, practicing authentic self-assessment, and setting goals based on evidence of student achievement. Each Southwest Michigan principal was recruited from a diverse sample that met the study criteria. The study design included data from multiple in-depth interviews and documents shared by the case study principals, and a teacher questionnaire with open-ended prompts that asked teachers to describe how the principal worked with them to build a collaborative culture.

The researcher first used a first and second cycle coding process to analyze the data from all three cases (Saldaña, 2013). This yielded thematic elements for within-case analysis. These elements were organized according to the study's conceptual framework and were compared to teacher feedback and follow-up interviews. Finally, a cross-case analysis identified five major themes for creating a culture of collaborative learning: conversation, collaboration, continuous learning, shared leadership, and expanding the culture. Reflection on the findings and further analysis of the interaction between these

five themes resulted in a new framework that suggests a ripple effect as an explanation for how those five thematic elements work together to build a culture of teacher professionalism, autonomy, and interdependence. The patterns in the data suggest that these principals start the process of building that culture by employing frequent, focused, and sustained conversations, which produces a ripple effect of collaboration, which ripples into a culture of continuous learning, shared leadership, and autonomy—all of which align to help the school achieve its student success goals.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The educational system in the United States has faced a continuous stream of changes during the last two decades with a goal of providing high-quality education to all students (McGuinn, 2011). The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 was introduced as a major federal policy initiative that required states to enhance K-12 student achievement. Today's student must possess extensive knowledge, skills, and a positive disposition in order to succeed and be engaged in the current global environment of education and an increasing diversity of cultures (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Vloet & van Swet, 2010). Moreover, policymakers of the Race to the Top (RTTT), competitive grant initiative under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 have placed enormous pressure on K-12 school districts to improve teaching quality. This is due to the fact that effective teachers are widely acknowledged to be the most important factor in student learning. Policymakers, therefore, are increasingly turning their focus to addressing the actual role that teachers play (Borko, 2004; Desimone, Porter, Birman, Garet, & Yoon, 2002; Lee, 1990; Parise & Spillane, 2010).

Twenty-first century teachers are required to not only acquire the essential skills and knowledge to be the best teachers, but also to have the ability and critical awareness of how to update their knowledge, develop their skills, and try innovative strategies that continually enhance their instructional practices and achieve school goals (Slavit & Roth McDuffie, 2013). As teachers become more reflective, they can achieve the desired changes that will lead to better student outcomes (Impedovo & Malik, 2016; Korthagen, 2004). Teaching quality, however, may not effectively improve when teachers perform their professional career in isolation (Dondero, 1997; Heck & Brandon, 1995; Rosenholtz, 1989b). The extent to which teachers work and

communicate together in schools to address both instructional and administrative issues can often predict both their students' as well as the school's performance. According to Hausman and Goldring (2001), "teachers must be central to any meaningful change in schools" (p. 44). Recent reform efforts in education have supported teachers' opportunity for collaboration, as it has great potential to improve teaching and learning. This collaboration can occur in a variety of ways, including their interactions, collaboration, participative decision-making, reflective practices, and open communication with colleagues. Collaborative experiences were documented as an inherent part of a positive school culture that could contribute to fostering teachers' self-efficacy, commitment, autonomy, professionalism, and empowerment (Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Lu, Jiang, Yu, & Li, 2015; Parise & Spillane, 2010; Timperley, 2011; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008).

Importantly, leadership practices play an essential role in school performance (Gimbel, Lopes, & Greer, 2011; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012). Successful school principals can use their leadership practices to create and foster conditions that support the learning and development process of both teachers and students (Gurr, Drysdale, & Mulford, 2006; Hallinger & Heck, 2011; May & Supovitz, 2011). This suggests that successful principals will create and nurture a place where both students and teachers learn and develop within the context of a collaborative school culture (Supovitz, Sirinides, & May, 2010). Building a positive school culture that motivates and empowers teachers to work collaboratively should be the top priority for all principals. Therefore, among the expectations surrounding K–12 teaching and learning, there is a persistent need for the principal to continuously develop a professional learning community that provides opportunities for professionalism and teacher autonomy, as well as the intrinsic motivation for growth and improved practices (Parise & Spillane, 2010;

Timperley, 2011; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). As such, principals should view teachers as unique adult learners who need to be motivated to actively participate in professional development and to use their unique experiences as learning opportunities for sharing their knowledge and experience with others. This also can be achieved through using critical reflection to improve their professional practices, and by having the freedom to explore new ideas (Riley & Roach, 2006).

In the American education system, teacher autonomy has received considerable attention since it has emerged as a critical component of successful schools and is conducive to enhancing teachers' roles in education (Brunetti, 2001; Pearson & Hall, 1993). Today's teachers appear to have a desire to exercise the professional autonomy in their classroom procedures because they believe that they are more knowledgeable about their own work processes and student needs (Blase & Kirby, 2009). Granting greater autonomy has been associated with teacher empowerment, professionalism, motivation, and job satisfaction (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005; Stockard & Lehman 2004). This sense of autonomy can be enhanced when school leaders recognize the power of teachers in the decision-making process in ways that empower them to act as professionals and be more responsible for their own work (Pearson & Moomaw, 2006). Autonomous teachers are intrinsically motivated to carry out their duties independently and determine the improvement in their teaching practices through thinking more freely and making critical decisions. This includes not only the scope of the instructional practices in the classrooms but also the ability to influence decisions regarding school policies. Having the opportunity to participate in critical decision-making reinforces teachers' sense of autonomy (Firestone & Pennell, 1993; White, 1992).

Pearson and Moomaw (2006) asserted that empowering today's teachers and granting

them the freedom to bring about the desired changes to the teaching and learning environment is critical for impacting all students' performance. They suggested that enhancing teacher autonomy should be taken into consideration when education reform initiatives are implemented. Allowing teachers to determine the best instructional practices for their students' learning and making decisions concerning school success can be an essential starting point for dealing with current educational challenges and demands. According to Varatharaj, Abdullah, and Ismail (2015), "Teachers need professional autonomy to carry out their duties diligently without any shortcomings" (p. 32). This encourages teachers to be more responsible for directing their own learning and professional development. In this way, teachers become lifelong learners (Trotter & Roberts, 2006). Understanding the importance of teacher professionalism and autonomy in a collaborative learning environment, the present study will therefore focus on the role that a principal plays in empowering teachers to grow professionally and independently. More specifically, close attention will be paid to activities the principal employs to foster teacher professionalism, teacher autonomy, and a commitment to continuous learning and development.

Background

Teacher quality contributes the most to student success. A substantial body of research demonstrates that teacher effectiveness varies widely, and that effective teachers support their students' learning and growth more than do ineffective teachers (Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005; Rockoff, 2004). Several studies show that successful teachers possess a number of characteristics, such as teaching experience, content knowledge, and instructional supports (Hill, Rowan, & Ball, 2005; Huang & Moon, 2009; Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Nye, Konstantopoulos, & Hedges, 2004; Rockoff, Jacob, Kane, & Staiger, 2011). Other studies also show that teacher competency relies on self-directed learning and self-reflection that motivate teachers to learn

new skills that support bringing about changes in schools (Dervent, 2015; Impedovo & Malik, 2016; Mengistie, 2014).

Recognizing the great influence of teacher quality on student learning, recent federal policies, such as NCLB (2002) and RTTT (2009), developed new teacher evaluation systems that include more rigorous, reliable measures for identifying teaching effectiveness and, in turn, ensuring highly effective practices for teaching all students (Rockoff, 2004). In order to obtain more reliable and unbiased results of instructional practices, researchers assert that teachers must be provided with more meaningful feedback and frequent observations that focus on clear and objective professional standards, which cannot only measure their teaching effectiveness, but also guide and motivate their professional growth (Shaha, Glassett, & Copas, 2015). In addition, engaging teachers in evidence-based conversations will lead to more positive evaluation results where teachers reflect on their own practices and set new goals (Anast-May, Penick, Schroyer, & Howell, 2011; Marzano, 2012; Maslow & Kelley, 2012).

Over the past 20 years, greater attention on standards-based reforms, such as NCLB (2002), increased teacher participation in high-quality professional learning and development activities (PD) (Borko, 2004; Chaudary & Imran, 2012). Research showed these PD activities encourage teacher collaboration by fostering opportunities (such as conferencing, mentoring, coaching, peer observation) that involve active participation and collective efforts (Buczynski & Hansen, 2010; Desimone, 2009; Fishman, Marx, Best, & Tal, 2003). These new PD opportunities highlight how teachers learn from their peers by observing each other, sharing different practices, and participating in more thoughtful dialogue that gives and receives positive feedback (Gregson & Sturko, 2007). Studies demonstrate that this type of teacher collaboration motivates individual teachers to examine their teaching practices and take charge of their own

professional growth (Goddard et al., 2007; Parise & Spillane, 2010; Thoonen, Sleegers, Oort, Peetsma, & Geijsel, 2011).

Working in a collaborative manner creates the core value of professional learning communities (PLCs). This enables teachers to participate in decision-making and share responsibility for improving their instructional practices and student learning (Lai, 2014; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001, 2004). Building strong teaching teams supports teacher collaboration that enhances relationships, reflective practices, and a sense of empowerment (Cook, 2014; Scribner, Sawyer, Watson, & Myers, 2007; Vernon-Dotson & Floyd, 2012). Therefore, leadership from a principal must create a framework of collaboration and shared decision-making, where teachers work together toward collective purposes and shared vision for improving teaching and learning.

School improvement research must pay considerable attention to the central role that school principals play in improving the instructional practices of teachers. This involves the development a culture of learning that focuses on improving teacher performance (Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012). Principals have the greatest impact on teachers' practices when they promote a culture of collaboration, where teachers feel supported as they work collectively to enhance instructional practices (Supovitz et al., 2010; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). In addition, May and Supovitz (2011) indicated that both direct interactions between principals and teachers and the distribution of that instructional leadership activities within a school substantially influence teachers' instructional practices and professional growth. Other research examined the influence that school principals have on student outcomes. Hallinger and Heck (1998) reviewed more than 40 studies (from 1980 to 1995) about the association between leadership and student learning and found that school principals have small and indirect effects on student learning

when mediated by teacher performance in the classroom. Waters, Marzano, and McNulty's (2003) analysis of empirical research (from 1970s through the 2000s) confirmed this by linking leadership to student outcomes, which found that school principals impact student learning indirectly by creating conditions that enhance the professional learning opportunities for teachers. Both of these meta-analyses highlight the importance of principal leadership practices in building a positive school culture that increases teacher quality and ensures that students receive a high-quality education (Marks & Printy, 2003).

More recently, Hallinger (2011) asserted that, since school principals impact student achievement via teacher quality, they need to promote the conditions within their schools by effectively supporting teachers and enhancing the learning environment. Gimbel et al. (2011) also asserted that building a positive school culture, listening to teachers' concerns, and enabling them to engage in the decision-making process regarding their instructional practices can lead to greater professional development of all teachers. Therefore, the work school principals do with teachers to encourage their professional growth and continuous learning critically factors into improving both teaching quality and student achievement.

Research shows that working in a positive school culture empowers teachers to make their own decisions about what works best for their students (Schermuly, Schermuly, & Meyer, 2011). This approach enhances teacher professionalism and autonomy by empowering them to control more of their work environment. In successful schools, a greater sense of teacher autonomy focused on professionalism and allows teachers more freedom when creating lesson plans (Balkar, 2015). Thus, teachers possess more positive attitudes toward their performance in schools and satisfaction with their jobs (Bogler, 2001; Bogler & Somech, 2004; Horng, 2009; Stockard & Lehman, 2004). Lu et al. (2015) suggested that school principals need to provide

teachers with an opportunity to participate in the decision-making process that impacts the whole school's success as their sense of autonomy and professionalism will be enhanced. This explains how providing the foundation for building collaborative structures that support teachers' participation in decision-making practices crucially empowers and mobilizes teachers to take more responsibility for student outcomes.

Problem Statement

During the past several decades, tremendous changes have occurred in the education system of the U.S., including an increased accountability movement, which have significantly constricted teacher autonomy and reduced the freedom related to improving teacher professional practices and student learning (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006; Selwyn, 2007). Unfortunately, one by-product of accountability measures can be an increase in teacher competition within schools because teachers are comparatively rated against one another on measures of student growth. A culture of competition can reverse the trend toward teacher collaboration and result in teacher isolation (Johnson, 2003).

According to Hargreaves (2003), "teaching has a long history of isolation" (p. 109). Rosenholtz (1989) argued that isolation probably poses the most negative impact on teachers' abilities to learn and improve because of forcing teachers to use the traditional models of teaching that rely mostly on trial and error. Under NCLB (2002), teachers are expected to improve their teaching practices and use more differentiated learning strategies that impact a multi-cultural society. However in recent decades, standardized tests, along with other high-stakes tests, have been increasingly employed and have reduced teacher autonomy in the schools, which has led to decreased motivation and attitude toward teaching. Consequently, many teachers today lack opportunities to make independent decisions around their classroom

instruction and practices that contribute to student learning and development. This has led to teachers focusing their teaching strategies on topics that prepare students for the tests rather than teaching them essential skills and knowledge (Strong & Yoshida, 2014; Wald & Castleberry, 2000; Wills & Sandholtz, 2009).

Another recurring problem relates to many principals across the nation failing to support teacher learning at a level that yields higher student outcomes. Under the complex multiple demands of NCLB (2002), current school principals are challenged to build a school culture that supports teacher growth and learning (Fink & Markholt, 2011); however, the complexity of the education system can interfere with principals' abilities to build their school culture and capacity to support and enable everyone in the school to work collaboratively for professional growth and development. Principals, like teachers, are pulled in multiple directions in order to meet the demands of an increasingly complex set of school conditions and an increasingly challenging set of expectations for student success. These demands can diminish the principal focus on teacher development and collaboration at a time when both are critical to school effectiveness. However, teachers cannot depend only on their own individual resources and perform their work effectively in isolation. The extent to which teachers effectively work with others on instructional and administrative aspects within a learning environment can significantly impact the performance level of the school (Gimbel et al., 2011; May & Supovitz, 2011). Thus, teachers as professionals should work within social learning processes so they can interact with others to learn, develop and adapt to change.

Building a collaborative school culture for teachers is an essential component of a principal's leadership role and responsibilities. Collaboration is a vital aspect of a positive school culture that fosters teacher professionalism and autonomy, and in turn enhances professional

growth and development (Lu et al., 2015). According to Supovitz et al. (2010), school principals need to shape a positive school culture that provides teachers with the opportunities to work collaboratively with others on instructional practices in a way that leads and directs their professional development. As Palmer (1998) advises, "The growth of any craft depends on shared practice and honest dialogue among the people who do it" (p. 144). Hence, because of the different education challenges faced today, building a school culture that values communicating with others and sharing knowledge are necessary for facilitating teacher autonomy and professional independence when making critical decisions about each student's learning. Current school principals are expected to build a school culture of collaboration that enhances teacher autonomy and motivation for continuous self-improvement that leads to higher student achievement.

A review of the literature reveals a substantial amount of research examining the importance of teacher quality as it relates to student outcomes (Akiba, LeTendre, & Scribner, 2007; Nye et al., 2004; Rockoff, 2004). In addition, a deep body of research describes how school principals play an essential role in school development, which substantially affects student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; May & Supovitz, 2011; Waters et al., 2003). Finally, many studies find that principals play a key role in enhancing teacher quality and building teaching capacity though engagement in high-quality professional learning and development activities. Studies in both categories referenced above point to the need for principals to be highly engaged in the teaching and learning process and, more specifically, in observing, conferencing, coaching, mentoring, supporting, and guiding teachers in their professional practices and growth in those practice (Anast-May et al., 2011; Denner, Salzman, & Bangert, 2001; Garrett & Steinberg, 2015; Garza, 2001).

Another body of literature examines the important role that principals play in developing teacher autonomy and motivation through involving them in joint decision-making (Strong & Yoshida, 2014) and teamwork (Balkar, 2015). Additional studies are needed, however, to describe in greater detail what school principals actually do to help teachers grow professionally and to be self-directed in their learning and growth. Some studies examined the importance of promoting a thoughtful and reflective practice, which is one way of influencing and empowering teachers to be self-directed in their professional growth (Impedovo & Malik, 2016; Korthagen, 2004; Simoncini, Lasen, & Rocco, 2014; Slavit & Roth McDuffie, 2013). However, additional studies are needed to better understand how school principals interact with teachers in order to support their professional learning and development in schools in ways that increase (a) reflective practices, (b) self-assessment, (c) self-direction, and (d) motivation to continue learning and developing teaching practice.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

This study focused only on the elementary levels because as the foundational component of student learning, it is where most of the education systems' demands and accountability begin including specific expectations for elementary students and how teachers must adhere to these expectations. According to Moomaw (2005), "Elementary school teachers have to follow more strict guidelines in curriculum and disciplinary actions as compared to their counterparts in middle or high school" (p. 78). The structure and systems of elementary schools often force teachers to work in isolation from their colleagues and teach their students more tightly prescribed curriculum compared to other grade level teachers (Pearson & Hall, 1993). Strong and Yoshida (2014) mentioned that elementary teachers possess a lower degree of freedom and autonomy to operate their classes and actively participate in school operations. However,

research has shown the importance of developing teachers professionalism and supporting their autonomy today, as they appear to be a contributing factors in school success and development (Stockard & Lehman, 2004). Principal leaders can foster greater autonomy in their schools by promoting the conditions and sharing the decision-making process that motivate and empower teachers to work collaboratively with others as professionals (Lu et al., 2015).

The purpose of this study was to understand how elementary school principals build a collaborative school culture that develops and facilitates teacher professionalism and autonomy through continuous growth and development. This study aimed specifically at examining the actual activities and behaviors that elementary school principals use to encourage teachers to grow professionally and interdependently in ways that can motivate self-direction, which leads to achieving personal and student learning goals through reflecting on their own practices, practicing authentic self-assessment, and setting goals based on evidence of student achievement.

The study focused on an overarching questions supported by four sub-questions as follows:

What do school principals do to create a collaborative school culture that supports professional learning and development of their teachers?

1. How do principals enhance the thoughtful and reflective practices of teachers to enable them to grow professionally?
2. How do principals foster authentic self-assessment among teachers?
3. How do principals foster teachers' use of evidence-based goal setting for developing and refining teaching practice?
4. How do principals foster self-motivation so that teachers continuously learn and grow in their practice?

Conceptual Framework and Narrative

This study examined in depth what elementary school principals actually do on a day-to-day basis that enables teachers to be more autonomous in their teaching practice, reflection, self-assessment, goal setting, self-directed growth, and motivation to improve their teaching and learning practices. Figure 1 provides the conceptual framework for examining the actual activities and behaviors that elementary school principals have used to build teacher autonomy and empowerment for continuous learning and growth. Because this study focuses on how teachers grow and learn within a continuous process, the framework is based on theories of adult learning and teacher autonomy. It suggests that by providing teachers with professional learning opportunities that support collaborative efforts, teachers can achieve greater autonomy in schools.

The basic premise of the adult learning theory is that the methods and strategies that are used for teaching adults (andragogy) differ from other methods use for teaching children (pedagogy) (Terehoff, 2002). Knowles (1980) provided a description of andragogy and asserted that adults learn in uniquely different ways than children because adults have more varied life experiences that they draw on as fruitful resources for learning. This enables them to be more independent, motivated, and self-directed learners. The concept of self-directed learning is one in which adults accept personal responsibility for directing their learning and growth by thinking reflectively on their practices (Beavers, 2009; Merriam, 2001; Terehoff, 2002). Kwakman (2003) asserted that experimentation, reflection, and enhancement of knowledge are essential professional learning activities that teachers need to engage in to improve their active learning and growth.

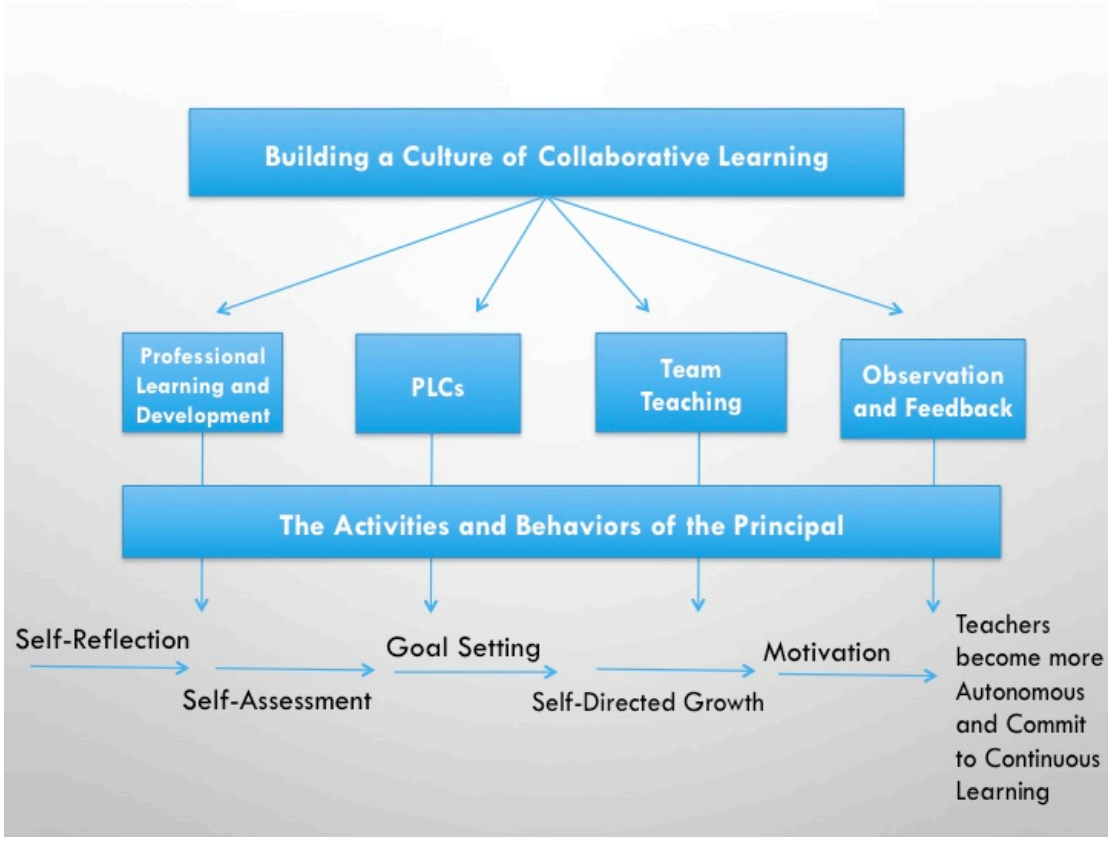

Figure 1. Original Conceptual Framework

Teacher autonomy refers to the capacity and ability for making critical decisions concerning their work environment and important educational issues (Pearson & Hall, 1993). Autonomous teachers have a strong sense of responsibility for controlling and directing their growth and learning through a continuous process of reflection and analysis of their classroom practices. Autonomy is a crucial part of teacher empowerment, which contributes to their sense of professionalism and independence, as it allows teachers to make critical decisions related to their classroom instruction and in regards to best teaching practices that will advance student learning (Pearson, 1995).

The basic assumption underlying this study is that teacher autonomy is a fundamental part of empowerment and professionalism that contribute to a teacher's professional learning and growth (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). Drawing on adult learning and autonomy, teachers with

more autonomy are more likely to be intrinsically motivated and empowered to direct and enhance their professional lives. Similarly, adult learning is an active, dynamic learning process for developing teacher competency and autonomy. The assumption is that through engaging in collaborative practices in schools and professional learning opportunities, adults can grow and learn professionally. Providing and supporting a learning environment of professional collaboration can lead to greater teacher autonomy, in which teachers are empowered to work together to expand their learning and improve instructional practices through reflection on their teaching experiences. In addition, the assumption is that creating a culture of collaboration through different professional learning opportunities, teachers can become more empowered and autonomous, and thus, independent in directing and developing their learning and growth. By examining the actual activities and common behaviors that elementary school principals implement, there will be a better understanding of how principals create the conditions in which teachers develop the autonomy needed to grow professionally and interdependently.

Methods Overview

This study utilized an instrumental case study approach that involves principals from three elementary schools in three different districts. This approach involved collecting multiple forms of data, including principal interviews, a teacher questionnaire activity, and support documents, to provide an in-depth understanding of how principals in the case study schools build teacher professionalism and autonomy to encourage continuous learning and growth. Yin (2003) and Stake (1995) suggested that the instrumental case study approach be used to investigate and analyze an issue that occurs in particular populations so that researchers can get an in-depth understanding of that issue. The case study approach allowed me as a researcher to gain a maximal variation sampling (Creswell, 2013) by examining each case in the different

school districts in southwest Michigan, which include urban, suburban, and rural or small town schools. These cases represent different perspectives of the issue (Stake, 1995). My intent was to have each school principal provide a broad range of evidence regarding what they do to support the professional learning and development of teachers in ways that increase (a) reflective practices; (b) self-assessment; (c) self-direction: and (d) motivation to continue learning and developing their teaching practice.

Significance of Study

By conducting this qualitative study, I gained a detailed understanding related to what individual elementary school principals do to develop the quality of teacher work within a collaborative school culture. Specifically, this study provided me with deep insight into the leadership behaviors and activities that three elementary school principals employ regularly to empower teachers to be more autonomous by applying self-reflection, self-assessment, goal setting, self-directed growth, and self-motivation to improve their teaching and learning practices.

The results of this study can be used to inform the work of school leaders in Saudi Arabia and bring about change that can foster self-reflection and self-directed learning and growth of their teachers by developing a culture of professional collaboration and professionalism. This study can also provide insightful ideas on how school principals in Saudi system can design more effective professional learning activities for teachers that include developing and participating in PLCs, collaborative team teaching, and multiple observations with feedback. This study can add to the body of literature and inform the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia and other school administrators about the beneficial strategies they can utilize during

professional development and coaching to improve the leadership practices of school principals as well as teacher quality.

Chapter 1 Summary

The purpose of this study was to gain a detailed descriptions of how elementary school principals interact with teachers to empower them to grow professionally and independently in ways that can enhance their self-direction and motivation through reflecting on their practices, practicing authentic self-assessment, and setting their goals based on evidence of student achievement data. The first chapter presents the background, problem, purpose, and significance of this study. The second chapter reviews the relevant literature that discusses how teacher quality impacts student learning, and the ways in which a principal's leadership plays a crucial role in shaping the quality of that teacher. The third chapter discusses the methodology I used and how I recruited my participants, collected multiple forms of data, and analyzed the data using first and second cycle coding (Saldaña, 2013). The fourth chapter presents case descriptions for each principal as well as a cross case analysis. Finally, the fifth chapter highlights the finding of my study and makes recommendations for how the findings can be applied, with a specific focus on Saudi Arabia.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to understand how school principals build a collaborative school culture that facilitates teacher autonomy and their continuous growth and development. Hence, the goal of my literature review was to understand how teacher quality impacts student achievement and how schools leaders improve the quality of their teachers. I also reviewed the literature on the scope of principals' instructional leadership efforts to improve the teachers' performance, as well as how principals can promote a collaborative school culture that empowers teachers' continuous learning and development.

Teacher Quality

In the 21st century, the major focus of educational reform in the U.S. has been providing high-quality educational experiences, in which all educators contribute to increasing the academic achievement of all students. Research on a school's effect on student achievement has indicted that outcomes in individual classrooms differ significantly (Rivkin et al., 2005; Rockoff, 2004). While other educational researchers have focused on identifying other school-related factors that effect student-learning outcomes (Hill & Rowe, 1998; Lee & Bryk, 1989), teacher quality is widely documented as, "The most important school-level factor affecting student achievement" (Looney, 2011, p. 440).

High quality teachers are defined as, "Those teachers who produced high gains in student learning" (Stronge, Ward, Tucker, & Hindman, 2007, p. 180). A large body of research has demonstrated how teachers play a central role in student learning (Kane, Rockoff, & Staiger 2008; Konstantopoulos, 2011; Nye et al., 2004). This fact has driven the teacher quality focus of 21st century federal educational policies to date, such as the federal NCLB (2002) and RTTT

(2009), and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, to focus primarily on promoting teacher quality as the key path for improving K-12 education and addressing achievement gaps among students (Rockoff, 2004). In this respect, understanding how teachers influence the academic achievement gains of their students is the starting point that should be considered in light of increased attention to teacher quality.

Impact on Student Achievement

Several experimental and non-experimental studies have demonstrated that teachers have a measurable effect on gains in student achievement. Such studies suggest that more effective teachers are able to support and improve student learning, while less effective teachers can have an adverse impact on learners (Looney, 2011; Rivkin et al., 2005). According to Palardy and Rumberger (2008), "A string of highly effective or ineffective teachers will have an enormous impact on a child's learning trajectory during the course of Grades K-12" (p. 127). This fact led other researchers to examine teacher quality in terms of how much teachers affect the achievement gains of their students.

For example, Nye et al. (2004) examined the teacher effect on student achievement using three-level hierarchical linear modeling (HLM), which estimated the variations of teacher effects within classrooms, across classes within schools, and across schools. Nye and her colleagues analyzed four years of experimental data of teachers and students who were randomly assigned to the classes. Analysis of the data involved reading and mathematics test scores of students from kindergarten through third grade at 79 elementary schools in 42 school districts in Tennessee. The findings of this study demonstrated that teacher quality was a strong predictor of student achievement in general, with the variation of teacher effects across all grades higher for mathematics achievement (ranging from 0.123 to 0.135), than for reading achievement (ranging

from 0.066 to 0.074). This study also found that teachers differed substantially in their effectiveness, as students who were taught by less effective teachers had reading achievement gains of one-third of a standard deviation (SD) less than students taught by more effective teachers. While the variation in the mathematics achievement gains was somewhat lower than one-half of a SD based on teacher quality, Nye et al. (2004) concluded, "Teacher effects are larger than school effects" (p. 253). These findings and conclusions support the notion that teacher quality is an important contributor to variation in student achievement.

Similarly, Goldhaber (2007) recognized that "Teacher quality has a much larger impact on student achievement than other schooling variables, such as class size" (p. 777). Goldhaber analyzed an extensive set of data from North Carolina, using a fixed-effects model that linked teachers' effectiveness to their individual student's achievement. This study focused on the all elementary school teachers and students in the North Carolina state from grades three through six, for the school years of 1994 – 2004. The results of this study indicated a large effect of teacher quality on student achievement as measured by the value-added models, with an increase of one SD in teacher test-score performance yielding an increase in student outcomes in both reading and math by about .31 of a SD.

Nye et al. (2004) and Goldhaber (2007) have consistently documented how teacher quality plays an important role in students' achievement based on study findings that show how the independent variable of teacher quality matters when explaining the variance in student achievement gains. While these studies primarily measured a teacher's effect on student achievement in current grades and selected years, other studies have aimed to understand whether the teacher effect persists over time. For example, in a later study, Konstantopoulos (2011) aimed to determine the size and sustainability of teacher effect on student outcomes that

may persist in the future or in successive grades. The author analyzed randomized experimental data from Project STAR (Student Teacher Achievement Ratio) that lasted for four years, kindergarten through third grades, in order to measure teacher effect in subsequent years of the academic achievement of early elementary grade students.

The results of this study indicated, "Teacher effects in one year were positive and significant predictors of student achievement in the following year" (p. 1559). Increasing teacher effectiveness by one SD in the kindergarten was associated with increasing first grade reading achievement of approximately one-tenth of a SD, and larger in the second and third grade at 0.14 and 0.13 SD. Teacher effects were shown to be more influential in reading achievement than mathematics achievement. Effective teachers at the 85th percentile of the teacher effectiveness rating within three successive grades (kindergarten through second grade) were more likely to increase reading achievement by approximately one-third of a SD. This effect is greater than the mathematics achievement by 25 to 50%. This study's authors concluded that teacher effect is significant in early grade and persists through the third graders' achievement in reading and mathematics (although more so for reading achievement). This finding is similar to earlier studies by Pedersen, Faucher, & Eaton (1978) who found that highly effective first grade teachers have a positive long-term effect on the consecutive learning years of disadvantaged students.

Taken together these studies indicate that the quality of both current and previous teachers does matter in the education process, where each individual teacher is found to produce meaningful effects on the current and subsequent years of student achievement. This common finding suggests the importance of all schools providing high-quality teachers, particularly in the early grades, in order to create a greater influence on student academic learning in successive

grades, thus, increasing students' chances to succeed in life. Since teachers may vary based on varying levels of certain characteristics, it is important to understand how to define the basic characteristics that constitute teacher effectiveness. As stipulated under the NCLB Act (2002), measuring teacher quality is certainly an important starting point in the recognition of the key role that teachers play in the student learning (Keller, 2006; Smith, Desimone, & Ueno, 2005). Hence, identifying the characteristics of effective teachers should be considered when examining variations in student achievement.

Defining the Characteristics of Effective Teachers

A substantial body of empirical research has examined the teacher characteristics that strongly correlate with increased student academic achievement, including teaching experience (Huang & Moon, 2009; Klassen & Chiu, 2010), content knowledge (Hill et al., 2005; Rockoff et al., 2011), and instructional supports (Nicholas, 2014; Pianta & Hamre, 2009).

Teaching experience. The level of teacher experience is an important characteristic that may lead to a greater professional capacity in teaching to enhance student achievement. Research concerning teachers' years of experience suggests that there is a positive link between teacher experience and student test scores; that is, when teachers gain more years of experience in their career they have greater knowledge and ability to raise the academic achievement of their students than do beginning teachers. For example, Rivkin et al. (2005) used a fixed effect model to estimate the impact of teachers on student reading and mathematics achievement gains. They analyzed a rich data set from Texas of over 200,000 students in grades three through seven in 3,000 public elementary and middle schools. The results of this study showed that experienced teachers made a greater positive contribution to student achievement, in both reading and mathematics during their first 3-5 years of teaching, than beginning teachers did. The variation

between beginning and experienced teachers accounted for only 10% of the teacher quality differences in mathematics and 5% to 20% of the variance in reading. Importantly, these results suggest that teacher experience had a more significant impact on student achievement gains after the first three years of a teacher's experience than during first three years.

In another study, Huang and Moon (2009) also found a positive association between teacher experience and student reading achievement, but only when teachers continuously taught the same subject. Three-level hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) was used to analyze multiple data sources concerning the number of teachers' years of teaching at a specific grade level and not just overall years of teaching experience. The sample of this study consists of 1,544 second-grade students and 154 teachers from 53 Reading First (RF) schools in a Mid-Atlantic state. The data collection included: the student data derived from the state Reading First database, teacher data collected by sending a survey to all RF teachers in the state, and school-level data obtained from the Department of Education website. The result of the HLM model indicated that the total years of teaching experience at a particular grade level had substantial positive impact on the student academic achievement at the .10 level. The effect size of experienced teachers who have more than five years of experience at a grade level is significant (effect size = .27), which positively correlated with students attaining greater achievement gains.

Rivkin et al. (2005) demonstrated a positive link between increasing teachers experience beyond the first three years and student achievement. However, Huang and Moon (2009) emphasized that having five or more years of teaching experience in the same subject and at a specific grade level had a greater influence on addressing the achievement gaps among students. This evidence would suggest that students taught by an experienced teacher, in terms of having more teaching experience at a given grade level and subject, perform significantly better than

other students with beginning teachers.

In addition to increasing the achievement level of students, teachers' years of experience has also been shown to have a positive impact on teachers' job satisfaction, which improves their self-efficacy, classroom management, and student engagement. Klassen and Chiu (2010) conducted a study with 1,430 practicing teachers in different grade levels from western Canada who had median years of experience of 10–14 years. The survey data measured teachers' self-efficacy and job satisfaction and was analyzed through factor analyses. The results of this study showed that increasing self-efficacy of teachers was significantly associated with increasing their years of teaching experience through the mid-career years, which in turn lead to increased job satisfaction. Teachers with 23 years of experience averaged 68% higher student engagement than did new teachers. This study showed that increasing years of teaching experience is a characteristic of an effective teacher that can influence, not only student learning, but also teachers' motivation and their beliefs in their instructional strategies and classroom management, all of which are directly linked with a higher level of job satisfaction.

Content knowledge. Content knowledge is another characteristic of effective teachers that many researchers have explored in relation to improving student leaning, particularly in mathematics. A study by Hill et al. (2005) analyzed teacher survey data and student achievement data in order to examine the relationship between teacher mathematics knowledge and the academic achievement of first and third graders. The survey data was obtained from a study of schools engaged in instructional improvement initiatives, which consisted of over 700 teachers and approximately 3,000 students in 115 elementary schools from the 2000 through 2004 school years. Using a linear mixed model methodology, the authors found that a teacher's content knowledge was a strong predictor of student mathematics achievement at both the first and third-

grade levels. A student who was taught by teachers certified in mathematics earned higher scores in math over time, nearly two and a quarter points of a SD of mathematics content knowledge on the Terra Nova test.

The instrument used by Hill et al. (2005) was employed by Rockoff et al. (2011) to measure teacher content knowledge. The authors analyzed in-depth surveys of 602 new elementary and middle school mathematics teachers and their students in grades four through eight in New York City public schools during the 2006–07 school year. The findings of this study revealed that teacher's mathematics knowledge is strongly correlated with high student scores on math with a coefficient of 0.019 on the math knowledge for teaching, which is statistically significant at the .09 level. In addition, students earned higher test scores on average when they received teachers who majored in math (0.04 SD, p-value = 0.2), while other students earned lower scores when their teachers are majored in education (−0.02 SD, p-value = 0.54).

In summary, these two studies underscored the importance of teacher content knowledge as it relates to a student's ability to achieve greater learning gains**.** As Shulman (1987) asserted, a strong knowledge base of specific subject areas is an essential element of teacher quality. However, having strong knowledge is not enough for a teacher to be considered an effective practitioner.

Teachers are required not only to be experts in their content area, but are also expected to be fluent in child psychology, skilled in communication, execute brilliant classroom management strategies, and navigate the unrelenting gauntlet of educational politics. (Beavers, 2009, p. 25)

Therefore, the scope of effective teachers' characteristics broadens to include the instructional supports that help to create a learning environment that advances the level of students' engagement and achievement.

Instructional supports. Effective teachers provide instructional support in their classrooms to facilitate students' learning. Research has shown that effective teachers support the social and emotional functioning of their students by providing them with opportunities to engage in active learning that enhance their success (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Pianta, Steinberg, & Rollins, 1995; Wentzel, 2002). Providing students with "emotional support and a predictable, consistent, and safe environment" motivate them to learn different things and to take risks, both of which are critical strategies for learners (Pianta & Hamre, 2009, p. 113).

Furthermore, by shaping a positive learning environment, teachers can help their students to learn and earn higher achievement levels. Effective teachers consistently manage or nurture a learning environment that enhances and sustains students' engagement. Effective teachers can use different strategies for establishing a productive learning environment, including fostering respect, justice, and trust, maintaining control over the student behavior, providing high expectations to students, and utilizing effective strategies that enable students to actively participate in different classroom activities (Stronge, Ward, & Grant, 2011; Vygotsky, 1978).

Another way that effective teachers can provide instructional support to students is through formative assessments. Good teaching requires the use of meaningful, detailed feedback as a essential part of any formative assessment, which can occur as a continuous process prior, during, and after classroom instruction (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Some studies have examined teacher practices and found that students achieved greater levels of academic achievement when they were provided with timely, high-quality feedback (Kane, Taylor, Tyler, and Wooten, 2011; Stronge et al., 2011). Accordingly, the way that feedback is used in the classroom can differentiate highly effective teachers from less effective teachers. In this mixed-methods study, Nicholas and Paatsch (2014) collected interview data from classroom teachers and test results for

84 students (49 males and 35 females), in order to examine whether providing timely and explicit feedback during conferences by classroom teachers helped to improve the achievement level of first-grade students. This study focused on academic reading skills regarding the letter-sound and letter-identification knowledge of students in their first year of schooling in a state school in Australia. The results of this study showed that the use of feedback during student-teacher conferences helped students produce greater achievement gains and increased their engagement level in the classroom. Students who received feedback had improved their reading skills of phonemic awareness during the early years of schooling. Utilizing feedback enabled them to work with other students in the classroom and share their reflections on learning. This study suggests the importance of incorporating feedback during student-teacher conferences, even in the early years of school, as a primary teaching practice. Importantly, feedback should be individualized, timely and explicit for every student in order to facilitate their academic performance and reflection on learning.

In summary, it is clear that effective teachers have certain characteristics that are related to their instructional practices and competencies and, ultimately, influence student learning. Improving teacher instructional practices, however, is a necessary step for increasing the positive influence that teachers have on their students' academic achievement. In this respect, teacher evaluation can be useful tool for differentiating effective teachers from less effective ones. Recent federal policies, including NCLB (2002) and RTTT (2009), have paid a great deal of attention to improving teacher quality in the education system and enhancing the continuous learning and development of teachers through the evaluation systems (Rockoff, 2004). Therefore, examining empirical evidence on how the evaluation systems are used to improve the instructional practices of teachers and their professional growth is particularly important.

Evaluating Teacher Effectiveness

Teacher evaluation systems have received increasing attention in the recent years because they serve as a critical instrument for ensuring effective teaching practices (Allen, Pianta, Gregory, Mikami, & Lun, 2011). Current approaches are intended to reform the evaluation systems by more accurately gauging the performance of teachers to better guide their professional growth (Hill & Grossman, 2013). Policymakers have recognized that the traditional evaluation systems lacked accuracy and effectiveness for differentiating teaching quality. Evaluators have done a poor job of providing meaningful feedback to teachers, which otherwise could be used as important source of data for defining certain areas of instructional improvement and enhancing learning opportunities for all students (Milanowski & Heneman, 2001; Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling, 2009).

Historically, teacher effectiveness was based on criteria, such as years of experience, educational attainment, and certification status, but student outcome data was not included in the evaluation system (Rowan, Chiang, & Miller, 1997). Additionally, school principals were not trained to accurately evaluate teacher effectiveness, so they typically completed the observation reports of classroom practices during one session per year and then provided an evaluation-rating summary to individual teachers. Traditional observation checklists were the primary source for evaluating teacher performance, which has been found to only slightly contribute to improvement in student achievement (Milanowski & Heneman, 2001). Moreover, feedback that teachers received from the traditional models was not related to the daily work of teaching, and was thus ineffective in creating an impact on their educational practices. Consequently, the federal RTTT (2009) and NCLB (2002) have placed an increased emphasis on improving teacher

evaluation systems, so that they are not exclusively based on classroom observations.

Teacher evaluation has undergone extensive processes of development and implementation. In recent years, student learning has been used as the standard in the new system in an attempt to provide more rigorous and valid measures of teacher effectiveness (Hill & Grossman, 2013; McCaffrey, Sass, Lockwood, & Mihaly, 2009). According to Danielson and McGreal (2000), "A focus on student learning should pervade the language and attitude of newly designed systems" (p. 19). Therefore, evaluating teacher performance based on student achievement has taken a major focus in current research, as student achievement has long been acknowledged in the literature to be strongly associated with teacher quality (Nye et al., 2004; Rockoff, 2004). Federal policy has suggested incorporating student test scores into the evaluation systems through the "value-added measures" (VAMs) of teacher effectiveness (Boyd, Goldhaber, Lankford, & Wyckoff, 2007; Hallinger, Heck, & Murphy, 2014).

Teacher evaluations based on student achievement. The Value-Added Measures (VAMs) have become an important component of the teacher evaluation system, which aims to hold teachers and schools accountable for student learning and growth throughout an academic year (Konstantopoulos, 2014). This model allows school districts to measure teacher effectiveness through determining the contribution that individual teachers make to student learning during a particular period of time, while also taking into account the socio-demographic characteristics of students (McCaffrey, Lockwood, Koretz, Louis, & Hamilton, 2004). These measures are beneficial to use as they are directly linked to student learning outcomes, and they are better able to determine a broad scope of teacher performance.

However, research has criticized the VAMs as they could be biased, and thus, they would not provide statistically reliable estimations over time. This is because of measurement error and

the inappropriate scales often used to assess basic skills of teachers (Ballou, 2005; McCaffrey et al., 2009). Teacher VAMs are also criticized due to the nonrandom sorting of teachers to schools and classrooms, and assignment of students to teachers (Rothstein, 2010). A growing body of research is concerned with the quality of VAMs for assessing teaching in practice, as it is extremely difficult to isolate the unique contribution of the teacher to student outcomes and accurately distinguish effective teachers from ineffective ones (Kalogrides, Loeb, & Beteille, 2013; Rothstein, 2009).

After reviewing studies that used VAMs to assess teacher quality in relation to student learning outcomes, Rothstein (2010) reported that the value-added approach is an unreliable measure of teacher effectiveness, as significant sorting biases impact the end results. Rothstein developed a falsification test that estimates the effects of future teacher assignments in a North Carolina elementary school on the current student performance gains in value-added models. Analysis of data revealed that the use of VAMs did not help mitigate the bias. It appeared that when students were non-randomly assigned, some teachers could have a substantially greater impact on individual students based on their performance during the previous year.

A follow-up study by Koedel and Betts (2011) replicated Rothstein's (2010) study in a different context to further examine the reliability of value-added modeling at estimating the teacher effects on student mathematics achievement based on multiple years of the dataset. While, Rothstein estimated teacher effects by employing only single-year data for each individual teacher, Koedel and Betts extended that analysis by examining detailed VAMs of teachers who taught multiple cohorts of fourth-grade students in the school years 1998 to 2002. This strategy helped to significantly reduce the sorting bias and produce more reliable measures of teacher effectiveness. The sample of this study included 389 teachers and 15,592 fourth-grade

students in San Diego. The study used three models to analyze the effects of future teachers: 1) the basic VAMs, which enabled comparison of teacher effects across schools, 2) the within-school model, which included school-level covariates and school-fixed effects, and 3) a student-fixed effects model, which helped reduce teacher-effect bias. The results of this study confirmed the main findings of Rothstein's study that the VAMs of student achievement can yield biased estimates of teacher effectiveness if only one year of data is examined. When Koedel and Betts used detailed VAMs that evaluated teacher effectiveness across multiple years, sorting bias could be significantly reduced.

Koedel and Betts (2011) demonstrated an overall difference of teacher effects, in which the standard deviation of the distribution of future teacher effects was approximately 63% of the size of the current teacher effects (0.15/0.24), whereas Rothstein (2010) estimated the teacher effects as about 51% of the size of current teacher effects (0.099/0.193). The evidence showed that VAMs are a powerful tool to analyze teacher effectiveness. Race to the Top (RTT) asserted that VAMs should not be the only teacher evaluation system, and they suggested a combination of the value-added scores and multiple observational measures of teacher effectiveness (Amrein-Beardsley, 2008; Kupermintz, 2003). Utilizing classroom observation in addition to VAMs can help to reduce or eliminate the sorting bias in teacher effectiveness and thus produce more reliable measures in evaluation system over time (Rivkin et al., 2005; Rockoff, 2004).

Teacher evaluations based on classroom observations. Classroom observation has been the traditional strategy for measuring teacher quality. It enables evaluators to acquire a deeper understanding of how teachers actually perform in the classroom. Researchers argue that the measures of the classroom observation should be based on clear, objective professional standards of practices and undertaken several times in a year by trained evaluators in order to

provide a more complete picture of the strengths and weaknesses areas of teachers performance and identify areas where professional development is needed. Thus, education policymakers include more rigorous standards and fair procedures in the observational system to ensure the validity of the measures for teacher effectiveness. In this respect, current school leaders are required to utilize extensive observation rubrics to rate the instructional practices of teachers that align with state standards of teaching practices, and then provide detailed written feedback (Garrett & Steinberg, 2015; Kane et al., 2011; Kraft & Gilmour, 2016).

In recent years, in response to policy efforts, states and school districts have adopted different rigorous observation instruments or developed their own professional teaching standards. For example, Framework for Teaching (FFT) by Charlotte Danielson (1996) has been used widely for evaluating teachers' effectiveness and developing their professional goals. Danielson's Framework is a research-based observation rubric that utilizes consistent measures of teachers' performance and describes their practices based on multiple professional performance levels of effective teaching. A key feature of the FFT is to provide teachers with meaningful feedback that identify professional conferences and other opportunities to improve their practices. Utilizing the FFT rubric also allows teachers to complete a form regarding their observation and reflects on their own instructional practices before having a conference with the evaluators, which has the potential to foster teachers' motivation to make important changes in their professional practices (Garrett & Steinberg, 2015).

Other researchers have examined whether classroom observations help identify instructional practices that helped promote student achievement. Kane et al. (2011) utilized longitudinal data from the Cincinnati Public Schools' Teacher Evaluation System (TES), which was conducted by externally trained professionals from the school who used an elaborate set of

standards to evaluate practices based on Charlotte Danielson's research. The authors analyzed classroom evaluation data on both teaching practices and student achievement in both math and reading. The findings of this study showed a strong correlation between teachers' instructional practices, as measured by TES scores, and student achievement growth. It revealed that a one-point difference in overall instructional practices of teachers could lead to an increase in student achievement in reading by one-seventh of a standard deviation, and in math by one-tenth. The study suggests student-learning gains would improve when the evaluation of teacher practices is based on detailed classroom observations. Such findings have helped identify practices that effective teachers use to impact on student achievement growth.

Other research attempts to further understand whether measuring teacher performance in the new teacher evaluation systems by observational protocols using the Framework for Teaching (FFT) relate to student achievement. Garrett and Steinberg (2015) followed-up on the Kane et al. (2011) study in order to explore the systematic relationships between utilizing the FFT instrument, as observational assessments of instructional practice, and identifying teacher effectiveness reliably as a contributor to increased student achievement. Garrett and Steinberg analyzed data from the Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) study that was conducted during the 2009-2011 school years across six districts and six states. They also analyzed the essential components of the FFT and tied them to student achievement from fourth to eighth grade. The sample of this study included 8,780 students with 581 reading (ELA) teachers in 163 schools, as well as 7,934 students and 528 math teachers in 156 schools. Garrett and Steinberg found that the instructional practices of teachers in both ELA and in math were significantly correlated with average student scores. The observed associations between teacher performance and student achievement gains in ELA were on the order of 0.11 standard deviations, and in math were in the

order of 0.14 to 0.16 standard deviations. These estimates are statistically significant, which suggests that teachers with higher FFT scores are able to increase student academic achievement more compared to other teachers with lower FFT scores. This finding supports the notion that utilizing observation rubrics is an essential feature of new evaluation systems that enable evaluators to rate the instructional practices of teachers that align with state standards of teachers practice. Providing a quality feedback, as one such practice of the FFT, is also a vital feature of new evaluation systems that help to explain the expectations for effective instructional practices and how teachers can meet those expectations. The authors caution, however, that FFT results should not be used as the sole tool for evaluating teachers, and that more work needs to be done to better understand how it captures teacher effectiveness.

Feedback is an essential part of any effective evaluation system that aims to help teachers achieve their professional goals. Providing quality feedback about classroom instructions has recently become a major focus of research on differentiating teachers' effectiveness and enhancing their teaching quality (Hill & Grossman, 2013). Researchers have attempted to address the traditional evaluation system via utilizing clear performance standards, which directly link to teachers' strengths and weaknesses and, in turn, guide their decision-making around future instruction (Garrett & Steinberg, 2015; Wayne, Yoon, Zhu, Cronen, & Garet, 2008). In addition, engaging in professional conversations based on the performance standards and classroom observation data has received increased attention in evaluation systems, as it empowers teachers to be more reflective on their own practices and plan to set new goals (Blasé & Blasé, 2003; Feeney, 2007; Maslow & Kelley, 2012).

In spite of the importance of providing meaningful feedback to teachers, some researchers have raised a concern regarding the way that feedback is implemented in schools,

which can hinder teacher professional growth. For example, Arlestig (2008) carried out a study with 24 principals in Swedish secondary schools to examine their communication with teachers in relation to teaching strategy to student outcomes. She found, through analyzing interviews and questionnaire data, that classroom observations were infrequently used, and teachers rarely received feedback. According to Hill and Grossman (2013), evaluation systems have lacked frequent observations that can result in more reliable and unbiased assessment of instructional practices. Since many observers do not have the training ability to provide systematic and constructive feedback, they struggle with assessing teacher effectiveness in a reliable way.

Despite these drawbacks, teacher evaluation can be used as a valuable tool to assist teachers in promoting their professional growth and learning. For example, Feeney (2007) concluded, through analyzing how the evaluation systems are used to provide teachers with quality feedback of a sample of 15 teaches in a large western school district, that "Providing feedback as a measurement of success can be something that promotes and sustains growth" (p 196). Feeney explained how an evaluation system will not enhance the professional growth of teachers if it does not support a meaningful discussion and self-reflection on practices that could eventually lead them to make objective decisions about own practices. According to Feeney, "The process of providing feedback should lead teachers to construct their own understandings in response to the context in which they find themselves" (p. 196).

Moreover, in an action research study, Anast-May et al. (2011) analyzed qualitative data to explore the experiences of 37 teachers from three elementary schools using face-to-face conferencing feedback. Throughout the study, teachers noted a desire for receiving frequent, specific feedback on observable data that allowed them to engage in rich conversations. This also elicited meaningful reflection on both current and future instructional practices. This type of

constructive feedback improved teachers' ability to set a personal plan for professional growth with new relevant goals, which ultimately led to better classroom instruction.

Feeney (2007) and Anast-May et al. (2011) showed the significance of providing meaningful feedback to promote the reflective inquiry of teachers and learning, which contributed to increased levels of teachers' performance, motivation, and self-directness. Maslow and Kelley (2012) extended Anast-May et al. (2011) and Feeney's (2007) findings by noting the importance of shaping effective communities of practices with professional opportunities for productive and sustained interaction among their colleagues in order to advance their teaching practices. An evaluation that focuses on both (a) providing meaningful feedback about teaching and learning, as well as, (b) fostering interactions with others in which they can share thoughts, expertise, or new pedagogical methods is essential for promoting powerful professional learning communities where teachers can learn and grow.

Maslow and Kelley (2012) conducted four case studies to examine how providing meaningful feedback through evaluation process can foster learning of individual teachers as well as collaboration between teachers. The researchers interviewed teachers, administrators, and department chairs in four large diverse high schools in the Midwest, including two urban and two suburban schools. The sample of this study included six teachers from two departments (English and math or science) and two or three administrators at each school. The findings of this study showed that formative feedback and peer evaluations led to increased quality in individual teachers practices and promoted collaborative efforts between teachers. This can happen when teachers are provided with an appropriate time to communicate with other colleagues in schools, as well as time for engaging in reflective inquiry while analyzing data regarding student learning and instruction.

While reflective conversations about instructional practices help teachers direct their professional growth and foster motivation, their collaboration with colleagues also contributes to the effectiveness of teacher evaluations and improves their teaching practices. According to Danielson and McGreal (2000), "A system that builds in collaboration, particularly if that collaboration demands reflection on practice, is more likely to yield genuine effort than one that does not" (p. 24). Recent research by Kraft and Papay (2014) also found a great impact on teacher performance when a collaborative environment with learning opportunities is provided. The authors used a North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey to analyze ten years of student achievement data and mathematics teachers' responses on the school environment in fourth through eighth grades. The findings of this study showed that teachers achieved higher effectiveness scores after 10 years of teaching when they were working in supportive and collaborative school environments. Their scores were 38% greater than teachers who worked in school environments that were significantly less supportive. This strongly suggests that the school culture plays a key role in explaining the variation in teachers' performance.

The studies by Maslow and Kelley (2012) and Kraft and Papay (2014) show that working in positive collaborative school culture is a fundamental part of teacher learning and growth. Hence, considering how this collaborative culture contributes to facilitating the continuous growth and development teacher is a vital area that will be the highlight in the present study. In particular, I explored how the thoughtful and reflective practices of teachers are fostered in supportive school environments that enhance the motivation and self-direction in teachers' professional growth and learning.

Teacher Professional Learning and Development Activities

Professional development (PD) programs have been widely implemented in schools as a

key mechanism for promoting teacher learning and, in turn, ensuring the quality of education that students receive (Zwart, Wubbels, Bergen, & Bolhuis, 2009). Over the last 25 years, policymakers and educational researchers have focused on expanding PD opportunities for teachers that provide the necessary skills and knowledge on content area subject matter (Borko, 2004; Chaudary & Imran, 2012). These PD activities are characterized as an ongoing, long-term, job-embedded process that concentrates on subject matter and student learning, while supporting collaborative efforts, active interactions, collegial inquiry, and reflective practices around instruction (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Suk Yoon, & Birman, 2002). These new trends in PD can support teachers as adult learners by providing them with meaningful learning experiences for exploring, experimenting, assessing, reflecting, and communicating with other peers from other schools (Gregson & Sturko, 2007). Moreover, high-quality PD can support the collaborative relationships that empower teachers to take the initiative to improve their own learning and practices (Vernon-Dotson, 2008).

Despite the great emphasis on increasing the participation in high quality PD, most of the PD currently offered to teachers utilizes traditional learning methods, which are ineffective for helping teachers create an important change in their teaching practices (Desimone, Smith, & Ueno, 2006; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Poekert, 2012). Most school districts across the United States have allocated a considerable portion of their budgets to teacher professional development; however, teachers are still unprepared to implement effective instructional practices that can meet their students' needs (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). This is because most PD formats are provided as short-term programs, and they mainly aim to develop teacher capacity in a particular set of strategies or materials rather than focusing on specific content (Desimone et al., 2002; Parise & Spillane, 2010).

A recent study by Tournaki, Lyublinskaya, and Carolan (2011) found positive effects on instructional practices when teachers participated in effective PD programs. The authors examined to what degree participating in the ongoing PD was linked to more effective teaching practices. Tournaki et al. analyzed classroom observation data from a sample of 153 public high school teachers, where about half of them received ongoing curriculum development workshops and the other half volunteered to be observed regularly in their classrooms instruction. The findings of this study revealed that increasing teachers' participation in high-quality PD should focus on on-going efforts that are sustained across possibly two to three years in order to improve the quality of their instructional practices. This study concluded that the effectiveness of instructional practices can be substantially influenced by teacher engagement in effective PD activities.

Another study aimed to understand how PD opportunities facilitate change in teachers' instructional practice and impact student achievement. Parise and Spillane (2010) examined the relationship between formal professional development, on-the-job learning opportunities, and changes in the instructional practice of teachers in mathematics and English language arts (ELA). The authors analyzed open-ended questionnaires from 1,210 staff members at 30 elementary schools in a mid-sized urban school district in the southeastern United States. They found both formal professional development and job-embedded learning experiences played an important role in fostering teachers learning and changes in practice. Importantly, engagement in collaborative discussion had the greatest impact on facilitating changes in individual teachers' classroom practices. This collaborative approach led to an increased change in math teaching practices by a .19 SD, and by .17 SD in ELA.

Thoonen's et al. (2011) study findings is in line with the results by Parise and Spillane

(2010), which placed a great emphasis on teachers' collaborative efforts, as they enhance teachers' instructional practices. Incorporating collective participation in PD activities enhances a collaborative professional culture among teachers where they can learn and work alongside others. Thoonen et al. (2011) examined the influence of leadership practices, school organizational settings, teacher motivational factors, and teachers' engagement in professional learning activities on teaching practices. The authors used a chi-square test in order to analyze the quantitative survey data of 502 teachers from 32 Dutch elementary schools. They found that providing high-quality professional learning activities played an important role in teacher engagement in experimental and reflective practices. They also found that it had great potential for helping teachers utilize a variety of the teaching strategies in their classrooms. More importantly, they found that teacher collaboration was identified as a vital factor that has a direct, positive impact on teacher motivation to employ new practices, as it "stimulates the extent to which teachers experiment in their classroom with new materials, try out new things and reflect on their current teaching, leading to better instruction" (p. 519).

The findings of the study by Parise et al. (2010) supports the findings of Goddard et al. (2007), who showed that collaboration contributes to improving teachers' content knowledge. They found that "The more teachers collaborate, the more they are able to converse knowledgably about theories, methods, and processes of teaching and learning, and thus improve their instruction" (p. 879). This explains the importance for today's teachers to engage in professional learning experiences that provide markedly different opportunities to develop as adult learners (Eraut, 2004), including observing other peers, giving and receiving feedback, and sharing expertise (Ross & Bruce, 2007). Collaborative efforts help build a positive school culture that supports professional growth. My study focuses on the importance of a collaborative school

culture by looking through the lens of three elementary school principals to see how they developed and facilitated teacher autonomy and empowerment for continuous learning and growth.

According to Danielson and McGreal (2000), "Growth and development are a process that must become part of the daily lives of professionals. There should be no time off from growing professionally" (p. 19). Given the fact that teacher quality is a powerful predictor of student learning and outcomes, it is vital that their learning and development be a major focus of the education system. Teachers should increase their participation in high quality professional learning opportunities that enable them to learn with others and in turn enhance their professionalism (Borko, 2004). Research has also revealed that teachers' quality may significantly improve through interacting, communicating, and working alongside peers where feedback, observation, and reflections are aimed toward improving classroom instruction (Borko, 2004; Kraft & Gilmour, 2016; Gimbel et al., 2011; Tuytens & Devos, 2014). School districts across the nation are expected to ensure the availability of high quality of professional development activities, such as teaming, mentoring, internships, training, and workshops. They also should ensure that these opportunities are linked to instructional contexts and enable active and collective participation.

According to Fullan (2007), "School improvement is an organizational phenomenon, and therefore the principal, as a leader, is key" (p. 167). An increased body of research has established the key role that principal leadership plays in teachers' learning and development. Research has provided strong evidence concerning how principal leadership has the capacity to build a supportive environment for school improvement that can facilitate the continued learning and development of teachers and their empowerment (Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012; Supovitz

et al., 2010). Examining how school principals create and develop a school culture that supports teachers in their professional practices and growth is the lens that this current study will look through. Hence, the next theme will carefully analyze the leadership practices of school principals and the actual activities that they used to develop teacher autonomy and motivation.

Leadership Practices

Leadership practices have a direct impact on determining the success level of any learning organization. Every principal has his or her leadership skills and competencies, which may help or impede the effectiveness of teachers in the education process. In the past several decades, during the effective schools movement, a substantial body of research has explored the area of leadership practices and the factors that influence school effectiveness. Early research efforts examined what principals do in schools to improve the quality of education for students, and how their leadership practices can positively influence teachers' instructional practices and, ultimately, school success (De Bevoise, 1984; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Since that time, numerous studies have viewed the instructional leadership model as a primary factor in school performance and educational effectiveness (Marks & Printy, 2003; May & Supovitz, 2011; Valentine & Prater, 2011). In this regard, many studies focused on the practices of instructional leaders that positively influence teaching practices and learning outcomes (Blasé & Blasé, 1999a; Leithwood, 1994), and the role that principal leadership plays in teacher capacity building and professional learning communities (PLCs) (Robinson et al., 2008; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012).

Instructional Leadership

Hallinger and Murphy (1985) presented a functional definition of instructional leadership that explains the central role of school principals as instructional leaders. Specifically,

instructional leadership is a leadership strategy that focuses on a number of leadership practices: determining the school goals that support student learning; communicating the school missions to teachers, parents, and students; working with teachers for improving their instructional practices through meaningful supervision and evaluation; supporting curricular coordination among teachers; and monitoring student learning using test results. The authors also looked at other practices that instructional leaders employ to develop a positive school-learning environment. These include setting high academic standards for student learning, providing teachers with sufficient amount of instructional time, offering opportunities for professional development, maintaining high visibility, setting priorities of the school for enhancing student learning, and recognizing and rewarding teachers for their efforts and students for their academic achievement.

All in all, the research underscores the idea that a principal's primary role as an instructional leader is to create a positive school environment where the instructional practices of teachers encourage student success. In this regard, many studies have strived to identify the relationship between leadership practices and student achievement and the evolving role of the instructional leader.

Impact of principal leadership on student achievement. In the last 30 years, increased attention has been placed on school leadership and its link to student achievement. For instance, Hallinger and Heck (1998) conducted a comprehensive review of the literature to identify the role of the school principal in student learning. They analyzed 43 studies conducted between 1980 and 1995 regarding the principal's leadership role, and found that principals have a measurable impact on student learning outcomes, but their impact is mediated by teachers' instructional practices. A similar analysis of the literature regarding principal leadership was

conducted by Waters et al. (2003), who synthesized 70 research studies during the early 1970s to 2000s. They analyzed a variety of leadership practices, including building school culture, motivating teachers, and providing instructional support. They found that the average effect size was approximately .25, suggesting that principal leadership has an indirect but significant relationship with student achievement. Moreover, Leithwood, Seashore, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) synthesized quantitative and qualitative studies in the school leadership literature and developed a conceptual model regarding the leadership practices and their association with school performance, including student outcomes. Their review concluded that school leadership has a measurable, indirect impact on student learning and that it "is second only to teaching among school-related factors in its impact on student learning" (p. 5).

With respect to the substantial indirect role that the school principal plays on student learning through influencing teacher performance, other researchers have built on prior evidence, but have employed a different lens. For instance, Supovitz et al. (2010) looked at how principal leadership and peer teachers influence change in the instructional practices of teachers as well as student achievement. They examined the effects of three principal leadership practices, establishing a school mission and goals, building collaboration and trust, and supporting the instructional improvements around teaching and learning. Supovitz and colleagues analyzed a data set of teacher surveys and student achievement in both mathematics and English language arts (ELA) that were obtained from urban public school districts in the southeastern United States for the years 2006-2007. The sample of this study consisted of 11,397 students from first through eighth grade and 721 teachers from 52 elementary and middle schools. They found that both effective leadership practices and peer influence have a great impact on teachers' instructional performance in both ELA and mathematics, and ultimately led to increased student

learning. This study suggests that building a school culture of collaboration, communication, and instructional networks among peer teachers are the pathway to improving the instructional practices of teachers and, in turn, student achievement.

Recently, researchers have come to recognize that an instructional leader's work with teachers should include supporting teachers' professional learning and growth. This can be seen in May and Supovitz's (2011) analysis of two data sources, annual teacher surveys and principals' daily activity logs, to explore the scope of principals' efforts to improve teachers' instructional practices from both the principal's and teacher's perspective. The data was collected from a total of 51 schools in an urban southeastern U.S. District (30 elementary school, 10 middle school, 8 high school, and 3 special education schools) from the school years 2005-2007. The results indicated, "principals' influence on instructional improvement is significantly related to their interactions with individual teachers" (p. 347). This suggests that when principals allocate time for instructional leadership and employ direct interaction with individual teachers, teachers implement positive changes in their instructional practice. To sum up, today's instructional leaders should include in their practices supporting successful teaching practices (Robinson et al., 2008).

The literature clearly indicates that school principals can positively affect student academic achievement when they use their daily instructional practices to communicate with teachers and encourage instructional dialogue with their peers in order to improve their teaching practices. Supporting teacher professional learning and growth is essential for creating a positive learning culture. However, the essential role of instructional leaders has evolved over time in order to enable supporting the best teaching practices for student learning.

The evolving role of the instructional leader. School improvement research tracks the

evolution of instructional leadership roles over time as a result of the increasing pressure on principals to deliver high-quality instruction in schools. The dominant role of instructional leaders from the 1920s to the 1970s was the supervision of teacher performance in classrooms (Hallinger, 1992; Marks & Louis, 1999; Newmann, King, & Youngs, 2000), which focused mainly on the day-to-day operations of the school, such as supervision, decision-making, and hiring new teachers, (Hallinger, 2003; Valentine & Prater, 2011). Over the past few decades, increasing changes in school accountability and expectations have expanded the role and responsibilities of principals more than ever before, with the aims of improving the professional growth of teachers and student academic achievement (Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012).

According to Wahlstrom and Louis (2008), "In the current era of accountability, a principal's responsibility for the quality of teachers' work is simply a fact of life" (p. 459). This is because "principal leadership is the only factor determining the approach of teacher development to be adopted in schools" (Lai, 2014, p. 174). Thus, there is a need to explore how school principals are supporting their teachers' work to develop their capacity for professional learning and development.

Principal Leadership and Building Teacher Capacity

Current school leaders are expected to be instructional leaders who create a positive school culture and conditions that are conducive to building teacher capacity. This can happen through fostering collaborative efforts (Gimbel et al., 2011; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012), as well as teacher and peer observation and feedback (Kraft & Gilmour, 2016; Taylor & Tyler, 2012).

Fostering collaborative efforts. De Bevoise (1984) stated that principals can enhance the instructional practices of teachers by creating a learning community and building collegial

relationships with the teachers. This can provide motivation for teachers to work collaboratively toward common goals. Furthermore, Timperley (2011a) argued that teacher learning and growth are strongly influenced by the collaborative efforts that focus on providing systematic support and strong communication in a school's daily working environment. Successful leaders see their schools as a learning community, which creates a sense of trust among the teaching staff to engage in conversations about instructional practices and participate in the decision-making process (Scribner et al., 2007; Vernon-Dotson & Floyd, 2012).

An example of this is found in a study by Gimbel et al. (2011), who analyzed a Likert-type questionnaire of 476 teachers and 135 principals. Their research goal was to examine participants' perceptions regarding how principals foster teachers' professional growth. They found that building an open and honest school culture is a critical factor for teacher capacity. In essence, these researchers suggest that fostering a collaborative school culture is crucial for advancing professional teaching knowledge and practices. This culture encourages teachers to work with others, and it allows for the sharing of knowledge toward solving problems along with planning for instructional activities. A collaborative environment fosters open communication and builds trusting relationships where principal can observe and provide meaningful feedback.

Another relevant study, conducted by Sebastian and Allensworth (2012), examined the scope of principal leadership work across high schools and within different aspects of school organizations. This included professional development, school learning environments, and parent participation. After analyzing student achievement data and teacher survey data gathered from 99 Chicago Public Schools (CPS) in the 2006–2007 school academic year, they found that supporting collaborative discussion enabled teachers to learn from and with their colleagues, which led to changes in their classroom practices**.** The findings of this study confirmed that

establishing a safe and collegial school learning culture is the primary mechanism for improving the overall quality of the teaching and learning process. It emphasized the importance of fostering collaborative efforts among teachers that enable everyone to be successful at improving student learning outcomes.

Teacher observation and feedback. As instructional leaders, school principals play an important role in enhancing the teaching and learning process in an era of school reform. Blasé and Blasé (1999a) for example, analyzed the processes principals employed when working with teachers. They found that providing quality feedback increases teachers' reflection on their professional growth. "Today, teacher evaluation systems are undergoing sweeping changes in order to increase their rigor and reliability for high-stakes decisions, as well as to provide teachers with actionable feedback to support improvement" (Kraft & Gilmour, 2016, p. 740). New teacher evaluation systems expect school principals to be active instructional leaders who work with individual teachers by conducting frequent classroom observations and providing critical feedback (Gimbel et al., 2011; Lochmiller, 2016). Research has highlighted the importance of principals' engagement in ongoing positive dialogue with teachers that enhances their professional relationship and fosters professional growth (Anast-May et al., 2011; Blase & Blase, 1999; Feeney, 2007; May & Supovitz, 2011; Waters et al., 2003). Increasing the amount of time instructional leaders spend in classrooms during the evaluation process can provide teachers with appropriate support and meaningful feedback (Lochmiller, 2016) and advance student and school performance (Taylor & Tyler, 2012). It is imperative that the feedback teachers receive is regular, individualized, and based on specific observable data. This enriches teacher professional growth as well as student learning (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008).

Another study suggests the importance of teachers receiving useful feedback during the

evaluation process in order to stimulate professional development activities. Tuytens and Devos (2014) analyzed 298 teacher surveys and 32 school leader interviews from 32 secondary schools in Flanders. The aim was to understand the procedural characteristics of teacher evaluation and leadership actions that contribute to teacher professional development. Results showed that "Teacher evaluation should not be ignored as a means to stimulate teachers to undertake professional learning activities when they perceive feedback as useful" (p. 522). The main conclusion of the study was that instructional leadership plays a critical role in influencing teachers to engage in professional learning activities.

Peer observation and feedback. Instructional leaders can provide their teachers with supportive opportunities for peer observation during the teacher evaluation process in order to promote their professional growth. This practice has a great potential to engage teachers in frequent dialogue with peers. This allows individual teachers to reflect on their own practices (Coburn, Russell, Kaufman, & Stein, 2012; Drago-Severson, 2012). According to Cosh (1999) peer observations can "encourage self-reflection and self-awareness about our own teaching" (p. 25).

Many studies have found peer observation to be a powerful tool for promoting teacher development. For instance, Ross and Bruce (2007) found that receiving feedback from colleagues along with observing one another based on well-defined teaching standards helped to produce overall improvement in teachers' professional growth. This study analyzed data from eighth grade mathematic teachers in a Canadian school who engaged for more than three months in an in-service program for implementing standards-based teaching. They found that peer observation should be included in the teacher evaluations system as a means of distributing the responsibility between school principals and peers for evaluating teachers' effectiveness and

promoting their professional growth. The result of this study is in line with Taylor and Tyler's (2012) research that examined how peer observations impacted math teachers' performance in Cincinnati Public Schools. The authors found an increase in the teachers' performance and, in turn, student academic achievement resulting from frequent observation and feedback cycles from peer evaluators.

Kraft and Gilmour (2016) conducted a case study of 24 school principals from an urban district to explore their practices for providing regular observation and feedback cycles in the evaluation system. Analyzing the interview data with school principals revealed "Peer observation and feedback systems held more promise for promoting professional growth than relying on principals to provide evaluation feedback" (p. 739). Many school principals explained how they are struggling to implement observation and feedback cycles that promote teacher growth. However, they also asserted that peer feedback was effective for empowering teachers to learn from their peers in order to improve the instructional practices and that peer feedback provides teachers with opportunities to observe each other's teaching techniques and thus reflect on their own teaching style.

Other research discussed how peer coaching could be an essential part of classroom observation process that enhances teacher reflective practices. This empowers teachers to work collaboratively with peers on improving instructional practices by encouraging reflective practices, sharing ideas, building new skills, and learning with and through observing others. Huston and Weaver (2008) and Lu (2010) showed that involving teachers in the peer-coaching program improved their ability to analyze their own teaching practices. These studies demonstrate peer coaching is a critical strategy for supporting teacher professional development, their reflective practices, professional dialogue, and their collective capacity for continuous

improvement.

Similarly, in a mixed method study, Gonen (2016) found that engaging teachers in peer coaching experiences increase their reflective thinking and their willingness to create new instructional strategies. The author examined teaching experience of the pre-service teachers (PSTs) who participated in a reflective reciprocal peer-coaching (RRPC) program by exploring how this training experience impacted their reflectivity levels. The participants in this study consisted of 12 PSTs (nine females and three males) who were purposefully selected from the ELT department of a Turkish university. The participants were involved in the RRPC sessions for eight weeks to teach one-hour classes in state schools as an essential part of their field experience. Gonen analyzed both quantitative data through the Profile of Reflective Thinking Attributes as well as qualitative data, including reflective diaries, video recordings of post-conference sessions, and focus group interviews. The results of this study showed a positive impact of the RRPC practice on reflectivity level of PSTs, in which the Profile of Reflective Thinking Attributes showed that the reflectivity scores increase after the participants received training on RRPC was statistically significant ($z=-3{,}061$, $p<.02$).

In summary, a review of literature revealed that it is worthwhile for instructional leaders to take an active role in building the collaborative learning communities in their schools where principals and peers work together on teacher observations and feedback. This interaction with others encourages teachers to improve their practices and leads to increased student achievement. This in turn promotes a positive school culture for individual and collective learning as a key dimension of those PLCs that empower school staff to work collaboratively toward collective purposes (Louis, Dretzke, & Wahlstrom, 2010). According to Drago-Severson (2012), principal leadership has a strong influence on the teaching and learning process through the school culture

that they create. In this regard, it could be beneficial to shed light on how a teacher's learning and sustained improvement are fostered within a professional learning community.

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

Professional learning communities (PLCs) are the most common practice used in schools for predicting the quality of instructional practices and students learning (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). The core purpose of PLCs is assisting teachers to gain knowledge and skills through collective efforts, reflective dialogue, and sense of shared responsibility (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; York-Barr, & Duke, 2004). Improving student learning is also a major focus of professional learning communities. This is because PLCs integrate the learning of all teachers within the community to share expertise and provide critical reflection related to student achievement (King & Newmann, 2001; Louis, & Marks, 1998). These professional communities have been recognized as a powerful strategy to work as a team to support collective goals and successful efforts. According to Supovitz et al. (2010), when teachers are empowered to work together toward collective purposes and a shared vision, overall teacher performance is improved.

Principal leadership and support is important for creating successful PLCs. Researchers have shown that creating the collaborative school culture is the most important factor for developing and sustaining PLCs (Robinson et al., 2008; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012), which can occur by utilizing a wide range of practices, such as shared leadership, team teaching, and shared decision making.

Shared leadership. Shared leadership for increasing teacher learning and improving practice is an essential feature of PLCs. Over the past three decades, scholars have recognized that leadership practices should not be constrained by formal roles; rather they can emerge

through strong and flexible relationships where continuous learning from one another is encouraged (Mayrowetz, Murphy, & Smylie, 2007; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004). In recent years, the focus of research has moved from one-person leadership to shared leadership, as this contributes to enriching teachers' professional learning and growth (Lambert, 2002; Marks & Printy, 2003).

Researchers asserted that sharing the responsibilities of instruction is a crucial aspect of effective leadership. By including teachers in a leadership capacity building, principals can empower everyone, which then motivates teachers to build their collective and individual capacity (Harris, 2004; Muijs & Harris, 2006; Spillane et al., 2001, 2004). According to Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001), "teachers can select appropriate leadership roles for themselves, given their own expertise, confidence level, skill, and knowledge" (p. 11). "Teachers who lead within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders, and influence others towards improved educational practice" (p. 17).

Marks and Printy (2003) utilized hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) to analyze the relationship between principal leadership and teacher quality. Their analysis found that when instructional leaders share the responsibilities of leadership with teachers, the quality of pedagogy was significantly improved. The authors concluded that "when the principal elicits high levels of commitment and professionalism from teachers and works interactively with teachers in a shared instructional leadership capacity, schools have the benefit of integrated leadership; they are organizations that learn and perform at high levels" (p. 393).

Similarly, Wahlstrom and Louis (2008) found that, "When the power differential between principals and teachers is lessened, the instruction is positively affected" (p. 483). They based

their assertion on an analysis of survey data regarding classroom practices and principal leadership behaviors from K-12 teachers in 14 schools in Minnesota suburbs between December 2004 and January 2005. They found that principals could indeed strengthen teacher instructional practices through sharing leadership responsibilities with teachers in the decision-making arenas. From the research outlined above, it is clear that creating professional learning communities for teacher collaboration with colleagues is imperative for unleashing the leadership power of teachers.

Teacher teams. Team teaching is another primary practice of PLCs that helps teachers experience a leadership role in their schools and enhance their collaborative efforts. This practice can stimulate teachers' capacity for sharing both their expertise and their critical reflective practices. This can create new knowledge about teaching and learning approaches and, in turn, to designing more effective lessons and instructional strategies. Hence, teaching teams are the fundamental mechanism of PLCs that support the interaction between individuals for joint work within different instructional activities (Louis et al., 2010). These teams are considered the heart of the learning communities and a valuable means to advance the teaching and learning process, as they play a meaningful role in promoting the shared leadership practices (York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

In their study of shared teacher leadership, Scribner et al. (2007) used comparative analysis to analyze field notes and video recording data of two teacher teams during one semester at a large public high school in a midsized Missouri community. They found that how teams are organized has implications for a team's creative capacity. They also found that attention must be paid to how leadership roles are distributed among team members. Supporting the collaborative interactions within each teaching team helped team members share their

leadership efforts and enhanced their autonomy and capacity for making decisions about their own classroom practices. Scribner et al. concluded that creating leadership teams can also increase the vital role that teachers play in schools.

In another study of teacher leadership, Vernon-Dotson and Floyd (2012) found that building leadership teams in schools and the distributing of responsibilities within a professional learning community are the keys to empowering teachers and establishing trusting relationships. The authors conducted a multiple case study to investigate the process of building teacher leadership teams in schools and school-university partnerships. They analyzed multiple data sources, including interviews, focus groups conversations, observations, and project documents from 44 teachers in three university-school partnerships located in Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and Virginia. Results showed an improvement in the leadership capacity of teachers and an increase in their collective efficacy as a result of expanding their roles in various leadership positions, such as mentoring colleagues. Teachers reported that when they were included in a leadership role, they took responsibility for assisting other teachers, which established trust and nurtured collaborative relationships. This ultimately led to an increase in their sense of empowerment and helped them to identify areas where they needed professional development. As Cook (2014) asserted, creating a school culture of trust that value and respects the input from everyone in school is the crucial path for supporting school efforts to improve academic results. Vernon-Dotson et al. also documented the impact of promoting shared leadership and collaborative, trusting relationships. The overall conclusion of these studies was that teacher teams are essential for successful PLCs, as they promote shared leadership practices among teachers for the advancement of their collective performance in schools.

Participative decision-making. Other researchers have explored different ways that

include teachers in the decision-making processes (Spillane et al. 2001, 2004). Decisions can then emerge through supportive collaborative dialogue where each person has different expertise to share and a desire to bring changes in schools (Marks & Printy, 2003; Spillane et al., 2004).

Cook (2014) recognized the importance of involving teachers in decision-making processes for facilitating their professional growth. The author analyzed survey data from 83 teachers regarding their perspectives on their leadership role for supporting continuous school improvement. All of the participants viewed the school principal as the critical element for building a professional learning community that facilitates teachers' leadership skills and professional growth.

In another study, Lai (2014) also showed the significance of promoting teacher participation in decision-making in order to build leadership capacity that supports school improvement. Lai carried out a study in the 2009–2010 school year with 10 secondary principals in Hong Kong schools in order to examine how their leadership practices contributed to building school capacity for improving teaching and learning practices. Lai employed a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with school principals regarding their implementation of a new senior secondary curriculum. Lai found that the best way that school principals contributed to building effective teaching and learning was by sharing the decision-making process with teachers. The research supports the idea that allowing teachers to participate in decision-making will has potential to empower them to be leaders.

Short, Greer, and Melvin (1994) considered empowerment to be "a process whereby school participants develop the competence to take charge of their own growth and resolve their own problems" (p. 38). Having the opportunity to make decisions is a key dimension of teacher empowerment that school leaders can motivate. Thus, teachers' sense of empowerment is

strongly related to their principals providing opportunities for shared leadership. In this instance, principals can take on the role of professional developers: individuals who design the opportunities for professional development among teachers. According to Mushayikwa and Lubben (2009), ”By empowering teachers, professional developers encourage them to take the initiative in identifying and acting on their own individual needs” (p. 375). This indicates that teacher empowerment occurs by distributing leadership roles among others in school, which enables them to take charge of their own growth and addressing their own problems.

Research also showed that granting teachers the authority to make independent decisions empowers them to drive learning progress. A study by Bogler (2005) examined the impact of teacher empowerment as a mediating variable on the relationship between teachers’ involvement in decision-making and their professional commitment. The author analyzed questionnaire data of 983 teachers from 25 junior high schools (including 7-9 grades), and 27 senior high schools (including 10-12 grades) in Israel that represented diverse demographic communities: urban, suburban, and rural. The questionnaire contained three scales that measured teacher's involvement in decision-making, empowerment, and professional commitment. Bogler found that teacher empowerment played a crucial role in enhancing the professional commitment of teachers and their participation in decision-making. Bogler explained that “Being involved in the decision-making processes can cause the teacher to wish for more direct impact on school life, feel a sense of self-efficacy and autonomy in making personal and organizational decisions, gain status, and strive for professional growth” (p. 91). This study suggests that involving teachers in the decision-making process is the pathway for schools to achieve great success and promoting their personal growth and development.

In sum, Bogler (2005), Cook (2014), and Lai (2014) asserted the important role of school

principals in creating conditions that allow teachers to take on leadership roles, which enhances their sense of empowerment and autonomy. Distributing leadership roles across a broad number of school members is an essential aspect of a positive school culture, where each individual teacher feels empowered to take ownership for their own professional learning and growth. This can also reduce teachers' sense of isolation by raising the level of their professional commitment to shared practices and a common language.

Teacher Autonomy

Teacher autonomy has been recognized as a major component of successful schools where teachers are intrinsically motivated to fulfill their tasks efficiently and increase personal responsibility (Pearson & Moomaw, 2006). Teacher autonomy was defined by Pearson and Hall (1993) as having a sense of control over one's personal work environment. Making critical decisions in teaching practices through independent and reflective thinking is a crucial facet of teacher autonomy. Such autonomy involves freedom from restrictions imposed by any demands or pressures from the school to carry out duties related to selecting the best teaching methods or certain instructional approaches for particular tasks (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005; Somech & Oplatka, 2009). In addition, Pearson and Moomaw (2005) discussed that "The general teaching autonomy factor is logically consistent with the need for teachers to have control over their work environment and to have personal on-the-job decision making authority, especially if they are to stay committed to the profession" (p. 48). Research has shown that recognizing teachers' authority in the decision-making process is necessary for increasing the commitment to the profession as well as enhancing their intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and student learning (Bogler, 2001; Brunetti, 2001; Horng, 2009; Stockard & Lehman, 2004; White, 1992).

Research has also shown that autonomous teachers can have an influence over making decisions concerning teaching and learning approaches that impact student performance. For example, Varatharaj, Abdullah, and Ismail (2015) analyzed questionnaire data of 471 randomly selected teachers from all Malaysian Cluster Schools to measure the level of perceived teacher autonomy and its impact on assessment practices. They found that teachers who have a greater level of autonomy could assess their teaching practices in the classroom and "take a positive approach to see the students learning and address their problems immediately" (p. 35). In addition, because teachers were allowed to select, determine, and organize the best teaching practices according to their student learning needs, their autonomy was viewed as one of the main factors contributing to student explicit learning. Finally, the authors suggested that autonomous teachers are capable of producing autonomous learners who are willing to be independent in their learning environment and are empowered to take ownership of addressing different learning challenges.

Other researchers see the value of teacher autonomy, but also believe that supporting teacher autonomy for their professional learning and growth requires restructuring the school working conditions. It is crucial that their autonomy be achieved in "the context of a professional community that collaboratively develops a shared consensus of what constitutes appropriate and effective professional practice" (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2010, p. 7). This is because fostering a collaborative culture of professional learning can empower teachers to take personal responsibility for improving their own instructional practices while achieving professional growth whether through collective or individual efforts.

Other researchers have investigated how school principals can influence a teacher's sense of autonomy through a collaborative school culture that they create for professional learning and

development. For instance, Lu, Jiang, Yu, and Li (2015) analyzed principal behaviors in building a collaborative school culture by influencing teacher autonomy and self-efficacy using a multilevel structural equation modeling technique. Data collection was obtained through two surveys that were distributed randomly to 107 primary schools and completed by 2,092 teachers in Hong Kong. The surveys were designed to measure a principal's building of collaborative structures, participative management, learning culture, and teachers' autonomy and self-efficacy. Lu et al. found a positive indirect relationship between building collaborative structures and teacher autonomy ($r = .28$, $p < .01$), which were mediated by participative management ($r = .46$, $p < .001$), thus explaining the importance of principal leadership practices in creating a collaborative environment that allows teachers to act autonomously through supporting their participation in joint decision-making. Creating conditions that support collaborative working among teachers and recognizing them as professionals motivated them to enhance their instructional practices and produced autonomous learners in today's era of increased accountability.

A phenomenological study by Balkar (2015) also showed that teachers perceived that by encouraging a collaborative environment and teamwork in schools, their principal supported teacher autonomy by empowering them to make and implement their own decisions. According to Balkar, "School culture is a determinative factor for carrying out teacher empowerment at schools, it is not possible to empower teachers without creating a culture that provides supportive conditions, physically and psychologically" (p. 217). Balkar analyzed semi-structured interview data from 43 secondary school teachers working in the Gaziantep province of Turkey. This study's goal was to evaluate the profile of an empowered school culture (ESC) and its characteristics by analyzing teacher experiences at the schools. The results of this study suggest

the importance of school principals valuing shared responsibilities and supporting teacher autonomy regarding educational issues. At the same time, the principal's close, trusting relationships with teachers made it more likely to foster their sense of professionalism.

Teacher Professionalism

Teacher autonomy has been identified as a key component of teacher professionalism. Pearson and Moomaw (2005) analyzed responses from 300 teachers in Florida using the Teaching Autonomy Scale in order to examine the link between teacher autonomy and stress, work satisfaction, empowerment, and professionalism. They found that an increase in the sense of professionalism and commitment was strongly interrelated with teacher autonomy. Moreover, Helgøy and Homme (2007) discussed the concept of teacher professionalism as "the level of practice where autonomy is spelled out" (p. 233) and involves "increased individual classroom autonomy" (p. 246). Ingersoll and Alsalam (1997) asserted that autonomy is essential for individual teachers who aim to perform their teaching duties as a true profession. Giving teachers the feeling of professionalism helps to support their authority in the education systems regarding making key decisions about classroom instructions. Therefore, granting autonomy helps to produce professional teachers who can identify and design the classroom lessons that would fulfill the learning needs of their students.

Research has shown that today's teachers are expected to be professional and have the personal responsibility to design their class lessons that guide a student to gain new knowledge and understanding through exploration and induction (Hargreaves, 2003; Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2010). From the late 1980s into the early years of the 2000s, there has been a shift in the teaching strategies that highlight the importance of professionalism for the current teachers and activate their own teaching and learning experiences. This can occur through designing their own

professional development, or directing their instructional strategies through the integration of knowledge of their students, evaluation of learning outcomes, and reflection on their teaching practices. Teachers must become capable of creating learning environments for developing their own insight, knowledge, and skills based on when they believe they need to be effective for increasing achievement levels of all individual students (Akiba, LeTendre, & Scribner, 2007; Rockoff, 2004). In this manner, teachers can act as adult learners who have unique needs to learn and grow.

Adult Learning Theory

The concept of adult learning was introduced and developed by Malcolm Knowles (1968). This concept explores how learning is not just confined to children, but it can also be applied to adults throughout their lives. Knowles introduced "andragogy" as the foundation of the adult learning theory, explaining that as the "art and science of helping adults learn." In later article, Knowles (1980) further argued that adult learners need to be self-directed, so they can achieve success in new learning within their current adult context. Self-directed learning and growth can occur through allowing adults to plan and assess their own instruction, improving their learning base through adapting to mistakes from previous experience, discovering subjects that are related to their job or personal life, and becoming problem-centered and critical in challenging situations. Self-directed learning is one of the essential characteristics of the adult learning theory, as adults take the initiative to direct their own learning rather than depending on others.

Smylie (1995) introduced a number of new characteristics to describe adult learners in the workplace. Smylie viewed adults as lifelong learners who use their knowledge and past experiences to learn in present formal and informal professional learning activities. In addition,

adults play an active role in the learning process through making decisions related to their learning objectives and dealing with problems they face in everyday situations and circumstances. Thus, according to Smylie, adults learn and make decisions about learning through being self-directed learners based on their prior personal experiences.

Ellinger (2004) defined self-directed learning as, "Self-learning in which learners have the primary responsibility for planning, carrying out, and evaluating their own learning experiences" (p. 159). Van Eekelen, Vermunt, and Boshuizenn Eekelen (2006) also described self-directed growth and learning in their work *The Will to Learn* as "having the ambition to discover new practices, being open to experiences and other people, being pro-active [attributors to] success and failure in terms of internal causes, question-asking after performance, undertaking action to learn, and recognizing learning processes and results" (p. 408). Three other identified essential goals of self-directed learning are:

- improving the skills of adult learners, so they are better at directing their own learning;
- empowering the adult learners to change their learning as the world changes around them;
- and promoting professional autonomy of adult learners by supporting their interactions with others as a key strategy for directing their own learning and development. (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007).

Slavit and Roth McDuffie (2013) conducted a study to examine the roles and conditions that influence self-directed teacher learning and professional growth. The authors analyzed several data sources from school-based and professional settings, and then applied analytic induction to determine the patterns of the teacher experiences and their developmental paths. The results of their study suggested "that in structuring professional learning, opportunities to self-

identify learning needs should be part of the process, and external supports can become more powerful when teachers play a brokering role in relating these supports to their immediate contexts" (p. 94). The findings demonstrate that providing teachers with the autonomy and resources needed to identify effective strategies will help them increase their awareness of ways to overcome obstacles to their own development. This supports the idea that teacher autonomy is essential to the self-directed learning. This is because it deeply engages teachers in the opportunities of professional learning and in making decisions about learning that are more likely to advance their own learning and growth.

Thus, the notion of self-directed learning applies to how teachers learn in the workplace when they have the autonomy to improve their professional capacity and address the challenges that they face throughout their teaching career. Through this, teachers can be adult learners who focus on improving their own learning as well as their students' learning (Smylie, 1995). Engaging in self-directed learning empowers teachers to have control over their classrooms and in turn, ensure that they are more responsible for providing high quality education to every student. This can involve goal setting, reflective practices, and self-assessment as strategies for learning, which can allow teachers to take responsibility for directing their own learning activities in a school setting.

Goal Setting

The process of identifying goals for professional growth and learning is a vital practice for teachers who aim to develop effective instructional practices and increase student academic performance (Butler, 2007, 2012; Huang, 2015). Camp (2017) examined teachers' experiences with goal setting practice in a study of twelve assistant teachers in the English department at Minnesota State University. The results of this study showed that "goal setting can benefit

teachers, whether through spurring them to directed action or through triggering thinking that leads to self-understanding and feelings of control" (p. 70). This illustrates how allowing teachers to set teaching goals for directing their own trajectory can inspire learning and improvement.

Research has shown that teaching goal setting strategies to students is also helpful for improving teaching practices. For instance, Rowe, Mazzotti, Ingram, and Lee (2017) examined the impact of setting goals on instruction promoting academic engagement of students who are at risk of academic failure. The study was carried out in a middle school in the Pacific Northwest of the United States with a sample of seventh and eighth-grade students (one female and five male). A 10-s partial-interval recording system via the BOSS© was used to measure active academic engagement of students during instructional activities, including how students responded to the teacher's questions and engaged with materials, objects, and tasks. The results of this study showed a strong relationship between goal-setting instruction and the students' active academic engagement. This demonstrated that "participants maintained levels of academic engagement above baseline during the post-intervention phase for 16 to 20 sessions" (p. 33). This is consistent with previous research that revealed how goal-setting instruction is an effective teaching strategy, as it helped increase the academic performance of students (Bruhn et al., 2016; Schunk, 2003). This suggests that goal-setting instruction should be an integral part of the teachers' instructional practices because it allows students to take ownership in directing their own learning and provides teachers with meaningful student data to set their own goals based on their students' academic needs. Additionally, research explains how teachers can direct their learning when they are involved in professional learning activities that allow taking an active role using their own previous and current experiences to solve problems as well as to plan and

evaluate their own learning strengths and needs.

Reflective Practices

The notion of reflective teaching practices first stemmed from Dewey (1933), who defined them as the ‘‘active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends” (p. 118). Dewey considered reflection as active practices that enable teachers to take action for developing their personal and professional skills and knowledge by being conscious, insightful, thoughtful, and problem-solvers. Teachers use these types of reflective practices when they need to address some confusion or an uncertain and complicated situation. Through a process of thinking, analyzing, and gathering information about a topic, teachers can gain new knowledge.

Smylie (1995) asserted that the reflective practices on prior learning are a vital part of adult learning, which helps to ensure that what was learned is in line with the current practices. Since then, critical reflection has received considerable attention as a method of learning. It is intended to help teachers think critically about the strengths and weaknesses in their current teaching practices in order to structure and restructure them to promote active learning in classrooms (Feeney, 2007). Reflective practices can increase teachers’ learning and professional development (Dervent, 2015; Mengistie, 2014), since they support the “Extensive and continuing conversations among teachers about curriculum, instruction, and student development” (Newmann, Marks, & Gamoran, 1996, p. 182).

Similarly, according to Schön (1987), reflective practices are intimately associated with action and continued learning. He defined it as the ability of professionals to think about their current practices, frame and reframe their current skills or strategies, and then adjust them as a

result of their reflection. For Schön, reflection alone does not yield adequate improvements in teaching quality without practicing "reflection-in-action" (Schön, 1983, p. 49). This refers to the necessity for teachers to reflect on their instructional practices during and after teaching, which enables a deeper level of reflection and awareness based on their actual teaching practices.

Research showed that self-reflective practices are a valuable means for facilitating the development level of both teachers and students. Dervent (2015) carried out a study with 10 pre-service physical education teachers who participated in the bachelor program of teacher education in the School of Physical Education and Sport at Marmara University in Istanbul, Turkey. Data was collected from reflective journals, interviews, and video recordings of micro teaching sessions in order to understand how the reflective experience of the participants influenced their professional development. The results of this study showed that the reflective practices empowered teachers to improve their ability to design their instructional methods and plans based on the different learning needs and interests of their students. This provided students with the instructional supports, such as feedback and questions, that they required in order to be more motivated to learn and engaged with others in the classrooms.

Another study by Mengistie (2014) added to Dervent's (2015) result that teachers can achieve valuable experience through reflective thinking and improve their teaching practices when they cooperate with others and receive meaningful feedback. Mengistie (2014) looked at how reflective practices on teaching could be stimulated through self-assessment and feedback from their peers. Data was gathered through checklists assessing how teachers implemented the self-reflection and peer assessment in a way that fostered active learning strategies during their instructional sessions. The study sample consisted of 50 primary teachers (32 females and 18 males) that were randomly selected from five primary Ethiopian schools in Bahir Dar town. The

results of this study showed that teachers who practiced the self-refection strategy were able to assess their teaching practices by being open to peer observation and assessment, and considered it a valuable means for promoting a teacher's use of active learning-teaching strategies. This study also demonstrated how reflective teaching practices can be supported through peer and self-assessment techniques, as they encourage the opportunities for teacher observation in order to give and receive regular-relevant feedback on classroom practices.

Self-Assessment

Teacher self-assessment has also been shown to be a unique approach that leads to an improvement in teacher effectiveness. Self-assessment strategies help a teacher become aware of her strengths and needs through reflecting on, evaluating, and improving her instructional practices, which can develop the awareness level of her "reflective backdrop for understanding her teaching direction" (Wold, 2003, pp. 55). Van Diggelen, den Brok, & Beijaard (2013) described self-assessment as "an attractive method for fostering teachers' learning" (p. 115). In their 2013 study, van Diggelen et al. explored the self-assessment techniques of 24 teachers in secondary vocational education and training (VET) schools in the Netherlands. Specifically, they examined how teachers use self-assessment procedures for assessing themselves and increasing their ability to coach students to develop their own reflection skills. Data sources used included assessment forms, video-taped feedback conversations, and written reflective reports. Results of this study showed an increase in the teachers' professional learning and competencies to teach students reflection skills when they receive constructive feedback from colleagues. This coincides with Mengistie's (2014) research findings. However, van Diggelen et al. also pointed out that creating a safe school learning environment is a crucial factor for enhancing teachers' conversations and feedback with colleagues, so all teachers feel comfortable enough to "question

the scores, their interpretations and additional feedback from his/her colleague" (p. 130). This research confirms teachers are more likely to feel empowered to be more reflective of their practices and engage in the self-assessment procedures in a safe learning and teaching environment.

Safe School Culture

Emphasis on creating a safe school culture that establishes trust and open conversation has been explored by previous researchers in studies on motivation and teacher learning and professional development. For example, reciprocal peer coaching is an approach that strengths teachers' professional capacity by empowering them to work collaboratively with colleagues in ways that improve instructional practices and student learning (Danielson & McGreal 2000; Lambert, 2003). Zwart et al. (2009) conducted a mixed methods study with 28 secondary school teachers from four schools in the Netherlands to examine the characteristics of reciprocal peer coaching. The researchers analyzed teacher self-reports of learning and student perceptions on teacher behavior to measure teacher learning. Teachers reported that providing a safe and respectful coaching environment was helpful for fostering intrinsic motivation to learn and become more engaged in professional development. In addition, classroom observations, a powerful practice in the peer coaching process, encouraged teachers to try new instructional strategies based on student needs and behaviors. Importantly, creating and maintaining a safe and constructive coaching environment enabled teachers to feel comfortable to learn and have the motivation to take part in collaborative professional development activities.

Other researchers have discussed how developing a supportive work environment that facilitates interaction with colleagues helps increase teachers' intrinsic motivation, which in turn positively influences their self-directed learning. Beatty (2000) analyzed teachers' journal

writings and the researcher's observation notes in addition to conducting interviews with a study group of eight secondary school teachers regarding teacher motivation and job satisfaction. The author found that collaborative reflection in study groups helped teachers increases their self-directed learning readiness as "they felt freer to experiment, to take risks and to be creative" (p. 89). All individual teachers reported feeling more motivated and satisfied about their ability to control their effectiveness in the classroom and reflect on their development. This supports that establishing a collaborative work environment is an imperative for professional learning that drives highly motivated teachers to lead their own professional growth.

In summary, it appears that establishing a collaborative community is an essential key for encouraging critical reflective practices that empower teachers to learn from their own teaching experiences as well as from the experiences of others through a variety of techniques. These include experimentation, observation, reflection, discussion of professional ideas, and sharing problem solving skills toward the accomplishment of continuous professional development. According to Impedovo and Malik (2016), "Reflection is seen as a tool to activate a desired change and is not seen as a solitary process, but as one shared with others, mainly colleagues" (p. 108). Beatty (2000) also stated, "Collaborative reflection in study groups for teachers may be a powerful catalyst to their professional growth" (p. 89). Instructional leaders who encourage teachers to develop a reflective practice that includes self and peer assessment in a collaborative, professional setting can help their teachers identify and engage in valuable opportunities to learn and develop professionally.

Chapter II Summary

Chapter two reviews a wide range of the literature that has explored how teacher quality is the most important avenue to student learning. As instructional leaders, principals can improve

teacher effectiveness by empowering them to select, plan, design, and implement the innovative instructional practices needed to increase the learning of all students in the 21st century. Importantly, instructional leaders can establish a collaborative school culture that empowers teachers to be active learners who use the teaching experiences of others to reflect on their own teaching practices and, in turn, design lessons with more effective instructional strategies that increase student achievement. Finally, encouraging teachers to work together in a collaborative manner can reduce teachers' sense of isolation by increasing their sense of community in the learning environment, which then increases their motivation to improve their own professional development and learning.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

A qualitative research method was used to explore for this study. Creswell (2013) suggested that a qualitative approach is appropriate when there is a need for exploring and understanding an issue and presenting a detailed view of the topic while carefully studying a group of individuals in their natural setting. For this study, my aim was to understand how elementary school principals build a collaborative learning culture that develops and facilitates teacher professionalism and autonomy through continuous growth and development. I was specifically interested in examining the actual activities and behaviors that elementary school principals use to encourage teachers to grow professionally and independently in ways that can motivate self-direction, which leads to achieving personal and student learning goals through reflecting on their own practices, practicing authentic self-assessment, and setting goals based on evidence of student achievement.

The study focused on one overarching question, supported by four sub-questions as follows:

What do school principals do to create a collaborative school culture that supports professional learning and teacher development?

1. How do principals enhance the thoughtful and reflective practices of teachers to enable them to grow professionally?
2. How do principals foster authentic self-assessment among teachers?
3. How do principals foster teachers' use of evidence-based goal setting for developing and refining teaching practice?

4. How do principals foster self-motivation so that teachers continuously learn and grow in their practice?

Research Design and Rationale

This study used an instrumental case study approach that involved principals from three elementary schools in different school districts. Multiple forms of data were collected, including principal interviews, teacher questionnaires, and supporting documents to provide an in-depth understanding of how principals encourage continuous learning and growth that builds teacher autonomy. Yin (2003, 2009) and Stake (1995) suggested that an instrumental case study approach be used to investigate and analyze issues that occur in particular populations, so that researchers can get an in-depth understanding of a specific issue. The case study approach allowed the researcher to gain a maximal variation sampling (Creswell, 2013) by examining each case in the different categories of school districts in southwest Michigan. The sample consisted of urban, suburban, and rural districts and represented different perspectives and challenges (Stake, 1995). Each school principal provided evidence regarding how they support the professional learning and development of teachers in their districts in ways that increase (a) reflective practices, (b) self-assessment, (c) self-direction, and (d) motivation to continue learning and developing teaching practice.

Yin (1984) described the case study research method as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used" (p. 23). In addition, Merriam (1998) explained the purpose of case study research as providing a "thick" description of the cases as well as "holistic description and explanation" (p. 29) through examining a variety of data sources and including one or more

individuals. During this study, school principals described how they build teacher collaboration, professionalism, and autonomy. They shared documents that supported and provided a deeper understanding of the work done with teachers. According to Merriam (2009), interviews can represent an appropriate method for collecting data when there is a need to have a clear understanding of participants' reflections, feelings, intentions, and point of view on the issue. Moreover, I asked teachers in each school to respond to open-ended questions regarding strategies and actions that their principals employ to develop their professionalism and sense of autonomy at their school sites. As the researcher, I listened carefully to their views and collected multiple types of data. In this way, I obtained information through a variety of lenses and developed a deeper understanding of how each principal approached the issues addressed in this study. Relying on these sources of information yielded descriptive data of how school principals interact with teachers in schools to promote continual professional development and learning in a way that increased teachers' sense of autonomy.

According to Yin (1994), "Case studies can be descriptive, explanatory, or exploratory" (p. 3). For this study, the approach both described and explored the interactions between school principals and teachers that supported the learning and growth of teachers as they grew more professionally and became more autonomous in their natural school setting. For this study, I identified three instrumental cases of elementary schools. Each case explored the work of a principal who had been nominated by key informants as someone who has been committed to supporting their teachers' professional growth and autonomy by creating a collaborative learning culture. To elicit data on the leadership strategies, behaviors, and practices that are used to enhance a school culture of professionalism and collaboration, I combined these individual cases to create a cross-case analysis that identified commonalities of how school principals enable

teachers to be more professional through self-reflection, self-assessment, goal setting, self-directed growth, and motivation in order to improve their teaching and learning practices and strengthen their autonomy.

Reflections on My Identity

When studying for a Bachelor's degree in Geography at the College of Education in Al-Hasa, I also worked as a teacher at middle and high schools in Saudi Arabia. This experience provided a great opportunity for interacting with students and school staff. However, working on my dissertation broadened my perspective on the importance of leadership in elementary schools. Leadership is about constant and active communication and interaction with teachers in a variety of settings. A school leader should be capable of developing and maintaining a positive school culture that fosters a collaborative path of teachers working toward achieving common goals and vision (Gumus, Bulut, & Bellibas, 2013). This creates conditions that encourage personal and professional support to bring about continuous improvement in teachers' instructional practices. When it comes to empowering teachers' learning and growth as lifelong learning leaders, leadership should focus on everyone. The more principals encourage teachers to be part of the decision-making process, the more shared leadership flourishes.

Comparing this new knowledge with my teaching experience in Saudi Arabia, I realized that the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia, which has the main responsibility for managing the education system and has the primary influence over the legislation, decision-making, and planning of classroom instruction, greatly impacts individual schools. Although, the Ministry of Education has initiated great effort to improve the overall quality of teaching and learning (Tatweer Plan, 2010), they limit the roles of principals and teachers, who then have little autonomy in determining the best instructional practices for their students. Because principals

and teachers are not involved in the decision-making process, teachers experience less freedom for directing their own learning and growth and hesitate to utilize their experiences as valuable resources to improve their teaching practices and enhance student learning. In addition, principals spend time managing the schools rather than supporting teachers in the classroom to assist in improving their instructional capacity, and this isolates them from interacting with students and observing classroom teachers. This top-down working environment encourages teachers to use traditional methods of teaching and promotes little motivation for changing practices or using new teaching approaches that could better meet the different individual needs of students.

According to Creswell (2013), "Qualitative researchers need to 'position' themselves in their writings. This is the concept of reflexivity in which the writer is conscious of the biases, values, and experience that he or she brings to a qualitative research study" (p. 216). When I came to WMU to study Educational Leadership, my goal was to gain knowledge that I could use to improve the education system in Saudi Arabia. In my classes, I learned theories that could be applied to develop educational leaders who are ready to deal with challenges faced their schools in an era of accountability. My learning experiences guided my research path and the desire to explore how the leadership role of school principals supports the professional quality of a teacher's work. Given the growing demands placed on teachers to improve students learning, I became interested in learning and exploring how school principals create the conditions that enable teachers to work collaboratively within the schools in order to improve teaching practices.

In order to improve the Saudi Arabia education system, I must transfer the knowledge that I gained from this study to inform the work of school leaders in KSA. If it is possible, I will disseminate the findings of this study to show other school principals how they can improve their

leadership role in schools through working collaboratively with teachers to build a common goal and purpose. By becoming aware of the benefits, school principals can support teachers' participation in decision-making in education and empower them to make their own decisions and develop their own skills. In addition, creating the conditions that facilitate the opportunities for teachers to grow and develop professionally takes into consideration dealing with and addressing the current complex school environment.

As an active member of my society with this level of education and knowledge, I aspire to contributing to continual learning and the development of the Saudi education system. When working as an administrator in my country, I will focus principally on improving the quality of both school principal and teacher work. My hope relies on the Ministry of Education of Saudi Arabia using my study to make decisions about professional learning and development that addresses the roles of both principals and teachers. In addition, school principals and administrators can use this study as a template to determine the best leadership and teaching practices that can be applied to improve the quality of education.

Population, Sample, and Site

Each instrumental case focused on a school principal serving in an elementary school in Southwest Michigan. The purposeful sampling strategy recruited individuals and sites that provided a deeper understanding of the research problem and answered the research questions of this study. Creswell (2013) explained how a purposeful sampling is the best approach when there is a need for selecting specific types of participants who can respond to the research questions and provide fruitful information for understanding the research problem under examination. Purposeful sampling strategies can be used to develop a typical sample that represents the average person, institution, or example of the phenomenon that needs to be studied (Merriam,

2009). Recruiting participants who represent different perspectives of the issue enabled me, as a researcher, to gather data from a diverse selection of schools and maximize variation in responses, which obtained multiple views on the issue.

Phase one of the recruitment process identified principals who met the criteria of the research. The participants came from a list of principals nominated through a letter to solicit recommendations (Appendix A) by key informants that included area members of the Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principals Association (MEMSPA), the area UniServe director of the Michigan Education Association (MEA), area members of the Michigan Association of School Administrators (MASA) and the Western Michigan University High-Impact Leadership (WMU HIL) Project Management Team, and who knew the work of principals in the southwest Michigan area. This area contains approximately 90 elementary schools in 22 districts within a greater metropolitan area that contains urban, suburban, and rural or small town schools. It was hoped to identify 15 area principals who fit the criteria for the study, but only eight were identified.

The second phase required sending the attached participation letter (Appendix B - Participant Recruitment Letters) to the eight nominated principals of elementary schools in the Southwest region of Michigan. The letter provided basic information about the study and contact information, so principals could inquire further if they believed they met the study criteria and were interested in learning more about the project. As principals contacted me, I reviewed the details of the study, answered their questions, and verified that they answered the study's inclusionary criteria that follows:

1. Completed at least two years as principal of their current school.
2. Received a year-end evaluation rating of effective or highly effective base on the state

requirements for evaluating principals in Michigan.

3. Indicated that the following items describe their work with teachers:
    a. I engage with teachers in multiple ways to build a collaborative culture for teacher learning and growth.
    b. I encourage teachers to assess and reflect on their own practice.
    c. I encourage teachers to use evidence of student learning to establish goals for their own professional growth.

After answering questions and verifying that the principal answered yes to each of the inclusionary criteria, I confirmed the principal's interest in reviewing the study consent form. After receiving responses of interest from potential principal participants, a time was arranged to review the consent form and answer any additional questions they had. According to Creswell (2013), obtaining approval from participants helps researchers facilitate data collection. Therefore, before conducting any interviews with each school principal, I reviewed the consent form and answered any additional questions (Appendix C). Interested school principals signed the consent form if they decided to participate, so, in this way, I obtained written consent before permitting principals to participate in interviews. Three principals became my three instrumental cases.

After securing those three principal consents, I asked the principals to assist in disseminating recruitment information (Appendix B - Participant Recruitment Letters) to his or her staff in order to secure teachers who would participate in responding to the six-question feedback instrument, or open-ended teacher questionnaire (Appendix F). The goal was to recruit at least 50% of the teachers in each school. For each principal case, teachers viewed a video presentation explaining the research and the six-question open-ended questionnaire that asked

teachers to provide examples of how principals addressed each of the four strategies of interest as expressed in the study research questions. Inclusionary criteria for teacher participation were as follows:

1. Served in the school for at least the 2017-18 school year.
2. Served under the current principal for at least the 2017-18 school year.
3. Spent at least 50% of a full time schedule at this school for the 2017-18 school year.
4. There were no exclusionary criteria for teachers who met the above criteria.

The video explained the research and included study criteria and how confidentiality would be controlled and privacy protected. The video took the place of an in-person presentation, and contained all the information that had been approved by HSIRB. I provided the principals with an email containing the HSIRB approved recruitment text, the video presentation, the consent form (Appendix D), and a copy of the questionnaire, so teachers would have all the information needed about the project. Included was my contact information so teachers could request additional information about my study. The principals forwarded the email to their teachers, so they could watch the video explanation of the study and review the consent form and questionnaire in private. Teachers were assured that their participation was voluntary, responses collected were anonymous, and the data would be aggregated and analyzed with no names for the purposes of this study. The teachers were provided envelopes in which to place their signed consent forms and completed questionnaires and sealed to maintain confidentiality. I picked those sealed envelopes up at the schools.

An all-inclusive sampling approach allowed for a larger number of participants, but did not require that all teachers participate. This purposeful criterion sampling strategy for the principals and all-inclusive sampling for teachers from each principal participant's school

allowed for the gathering of a richness amount of data and, in turn, provided a clearer understanding of the research problem. This strategy allowed for the examination and investigation of the unique experiences of principals and teachers who contributed ideas addressing the issues addressed this study.

Through the process and procedures described, I recruited a number of teachers from each school to complete an open-ended questionnaire. From Principal One's school, five teachers consented out of 19 full-time teachers, from Principal Two's school, nine teachers consented out of the 29 full-time teachers, and from Principal Three's school, and one teacher consented out of the 41 full-time teachers. This did not reach the goal of 50% teacher participation, but did provide data to corroborate information that the principals shared during their interviews.

Instrumentation

Data collected through initial interviews and two follow-up sessions with each principal, as well as teacher questionnaires, was organized for each school. Each principal also provided documents that illustrated how they promoted one or more of the four teacher development practices that are the focus of my dissertation: reflective practice, self-assessment, evidence-based goal setting, and motivation for continuous learning and growth. Utilizing these three data sources increased the credibility of my case study research (Patton, 1990; Yin, 2003) and helped me develop a detailed, in-depth understanding of the issue (Creswell, 2013). Yin (1984) explains the case study design as "An empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used" (p. 23).

My initial semi-structured interviews were conducted with each principal using the Principal Interview Protocol included in Appendix E. This provided a consistent set of pre-

established open-ended questions that kept the focus on the research but also allowed for probing inquiry regarding new ideas on a topic shared during an interview. The open-ended protocol allowed for the extension of information provided during the interview by asking additional questions to clarify and give examples. The initial open-ended interview questions addressed the overarching research question as well as each of the four sub-questions. By using a variety of questions, I was able to elicit responses from each principal on how they built a collaborative school culture that empowers teachers to be more professional in seeking continuous learning and growth.

In addition, I used the literature review for designing, guiding, and shaping the interview questions. This strategy assisted me in isolating each of the four sub-components to better understand how these principals built teacher professionalism and autonomy with their teachers. This method of designing the interview protocol helped me obtain in-depth, descriptive qualitative data.

I provided each principal with the interview protocol prior to the scheduled interview. This allowed them to preview the questions and pull together documents to illustrate their leadership in the areas relevant to the focus of this study. I asked them to focus on documents that illustrate their actions, show how they interact with teachers during professional learning conferences and meetings, and how they work with teachers to increase (a) reflective practices, (b) self-assessment, (c) self-direction, and (d) motivation to continue learning and developing their teaching practice.

After analyzing the initial interviews, I conducted two follow-up interviews with each principal based on areas where clarification was needed. My purpose was to gather more information to clarify or expand what I learned from the initial interviews regarding the

principals' activities or behaviors that enhanced teacher professionalism and autonomy. During these interviews, I shared with each principal the final themes that I developed through the analysis of the initial interview as a way to validate the findings and enrich my analysis. The protocol for the follow-up interview can be found in Appendix G. The follow-up interviews contained some questions that were similar for all three principals, but also questions that were specific to a single principal. Asking individualized questions during follow-up interviews enriched my data by giving deeper insight into the behaviors and activities of each principal.

I obtained information from teachers by collecting their responses to six open-ended questions (Appendix F). The purpose of the questionnaire was to gather information on how each principal worked to build a collaborative school culture that enhances teacher professionalism and autonomy for promoting continuous learning and development. By gathering various forms of evidence from both principals and teachers, I was able to gain in-depth understanding of their perspectives. Lincoln (2005) explained that, "Qualitative research is inherently multi-method in focus. However, the use of multiple methods, or triangulation, reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question" (p. 5). I triangulated by using three sources of data collection – principals, teachers and documents.

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection procedures involved semi-structured, face-to-face, in-depth interviews with each school principal to enable them to share ideas regarding how they build a school culture of professional learning and collaboration, and in turn, gain a clearer understanding of how their teachers become more professional and autonomous. Before conducting these initial interviews, I pilot tested my interview protocol with two other school principals, and this allowed me to refine some questions and ensure the appropriateness of the

instrument (Creswell, 2013). The first interviews lasted 60 to 75 minutes, and that gave me a wealth of information about the strategies and activities each principal used to develop and support teachers in school. I conducted each of the two follow-up interviews for 30-45 minutes with the aim of gathering additional information that allowed me to have a clearer understanding of how each principal developed a school culture of teacher continuous learning and development.

Creswell (2013) mentioned that an interview should take place at a mutually agreed upon location and time to enable participants to be engaged in conversation in a comfortable and familiar environment. Accordingly, I worked with the principals to identify the most convenient and comfortable time and place for them. Providing an appropriate place for interviewing facilitated the flow of the conversations and avoided any distractions. During each interview, I showed the highest level of respect when asking questions and dealing with participant unease. Each participant was informed about the purpose of this study, how the results from the interviews would be analyzed, and offered a copy of the interview transcript (Merriam, 1998). At the beginning of each session, I asked for permission to record and transcribe the interview then used a lapel microphone in order to ensure an accurate record of everything said to increase the validity of my data and reduce the possibility of losing important information. High-quality types of digital recording device information ensured that the length of the tapes was appropriate (Creswell, 2013).

Automatic transcription software called “Happy Scribe” was used to transcribe all the interview recordings with proper precautions to protect confidentiality and principal anonymity. I then saved them as a Microsoft Word document. Once interviews were transcribed, I reviewed and edited the transcripts multiple times to ensure that each principal’s responses were accurately

captured. After verifying the accuracy of the transcriptions, I analyzed the transcribed interview data in order to identify both general and unique themes.

To maintain the confidentiality of information collected for each participant in this study, I assigned codes and pseudonyms when I transcribed the data instead of identifying their identities and actual names. All personal identifying information was replaced with pseudonyms and/or redacted from recorded and transcribed material. I also redacted any identifying references in order to protect the anonymity of participants and the setting for the study. I used a password protected and encrypted electronic storage device to contain all audio recordings, transcripts, questionnaire responses, and other working documents while conducting this study. According to Creswell (2013), "A qualitative researcher must decide how he or she will store data so that they can easily be found and protected from damage or loss" (p. 147). This approach insured that all study data is properly saved, managed, and prepared for easier retrieval during intensive analysis (Merriam, 1998). During data collection, the password protected, encrypted storage device for my study data and working papers was maintained in a secure, locked file in my home office. When transporting study materials, I placed them in the locked trunk of my vehicle and locked the vehicle when I was not in it. Upon completion of the study, I will transfer all study documents to the Western Michigan University research archives for storage for the required three-year period.

Trustworthiness

In order to address the trustworthiness of my data and provide further confirmation of the findings, I employed triangulation of the data: member checking, peer debriefing, and rich, thick descriptions. According to Creswell (2013), triangulation of the data is a highly valuable method for establishing the validity of qualitative research findings. Because my data came from

multiple sources, including principal interviews, teacher questionnaires, and supporting documents, I was able to provide corroborating evidence for each case (Yin, 2003). This process involved comparing the data generated and determining convergence of data to ensure the consistency of the process and findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The use of triangulation provided a wealth of information throughout the data collection analysis process, which led to more accurate results and conclusions. Using a cross-case analysis, where similar results emerged from different schools, my findings achieved greater credibility.

Member checking occurred as I asked each principal to thoroughly review the in-depth summaries of their interviews and provide comments and suggestions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). Each principal was provided with an opportunity to engage with, and add to, the interview and interpreted data to determine if it aligned with their experiences. Receiving feedback from principals helped confirm my research study findings (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995) and ensure that my data provided a rich picture of each principal's activities or behaviors in creating a collaborative learning culture.

In completing peer debriefing, I worked with a WMU faculty member who has prior experience with my research topic. Throughout all of my process of data collection, analysis, findings, and conclusions, she was able to review and examine my codes and data categorization. Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined peer debriefing as "A process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytical sessions and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (p. 308). My academic advisor also offered her insight and suggestions on emerging themes to determine if the results were plausible. This approach provided opportunities to receive

continuous beneficial feedback for organizing useful and highly in-depth information, which enhanced credibility and ensured the validity of my findings.

Finally, I included rich, thick descriptions in my study by providing thorough explanations of how I recruited the participants for my study as well as how I collected and analyzed my data. My qualitative research described in detail how each principal worked with teachers to develop their sense of autonomy and professionalism and build a collaborative culture of shared leadership (Merriam, 1998). This process will help readers determine how my methods could be applied in other settings (Creswell, 2007).

Data Analysis

In this multiple-case studies design, I started by analyzing each case separately using the inductive approach and then carried out a cross-analysis of the three cases. This approach provided both an individual, bounded description of each case as well as a description of both their common and distinctive elements across the cases. Patton (2015) discussed qualitative, inductive analysis as "generating new concepts, explanations, results, and/or theories from the specific data of a qualitative study" (p. 541). Therefore, using the inductive approach let the themes emerge from the data.

During the process of coding and data analysis, I employed several phases using *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* by Saldaña (2013) to analyze interview data for themes, sub-themes, and elements. Phase 1 in the sequential process was reading and reviewing each transcript multiple times to capture my overall impressions via a series of memos. Before extracting *in vivo* codes, I read the transcriptions one more time, making notations in the margin regarding insights and key ideas. This assisted me with initial data exploration and provided an initial sense of the information before extracting *in vivo* codes and organizing data into

categories that facilitated the thick, rich description of each case and identifying thematic elements that cut across all of the data sources (Creswell, 2013).

Phase 2 of data analysis began with identifying salient points in the interviews with each principal, then extracting those points for the purpose of discovering common patterns that suggested thematic ideas, or dimensions in the data that reflected the main activities, behaviors, or strategies as they related to each of the research questions. To generate richer meaning, I reviewed the interview transcripts numerous times to search for confirming evidence that might explain ideas or behaviors. This process helped me move forward from the entire data set to a set of focused codes that captured the common and most frequent ideas presented by each principal after "careful reading and re-reading of the data" (Rice & Ezzy, 1999, p. 258). In other words, I organized and tested various ways of clustering and categorizing the *in vivo* codes until I achieved a set of coding categories for each principal's transcript that captured the essence of the ideas embedded in each interview. In moving from the first to second cycle of coding, I employed the literature review as an interpretive or conceptual lens for understanding what emerged from the data. Using the literature as a rich source of information guided me throughout the analytic process, allowing me to distill a final set of thematic groupings for each principal. I also used member checks with each principal to confirm the final themes, sub-themes, and elements, and provide them with an invitation to review and add to or explain anything they wanted to clarify.

Phase 3 of the data analysis replicated that of Phase 2, but focused on the analysis of the teacher feedback data from the open-ended questionnaire, comparing that to the ideas that emerged from principal interviews. I also made notations in the documents provided by each principal and clustered and categorized those notations into a schema that summarized what I

learned from those documents. Next. I analyzed four types of data sources for each case, including the first principal interview, documents, teacher feedback data, and the principal's follow-up interviews to write a full, thick-rich description of each case. I then completed triangulation for each case in order to view, explore, and compare the information that I collected from the four data sources. In this phase, I noted where the categories of elements were in sync across the three forms of data, and where they were not. Finally, I used a cross-case analysis of the three case studies to determine the similarities and differences between the three cases (Yin, 2003). This involved comparing the major themes and sub-themes that emerged from each case to identify common elements that each of the principals employed to empower teachers and encourage continuous learning and growth.

The final phase in the process is interpreting the data. Marshall and Rossman (2016) explained the importance of a qualitative researcher offering interpretations that make sense of the findings and create meanings from the categories, themes, and patterns. Therefore, after formatting different themes and identifying appropriate codes, I organized themes into large units to make sense of the data. I interpreted the data based on insights gleaned from the larger units, then linked the findings to other research studies.

Limitations and Delimitations

I have delimited this study to only focus on three principals of elementary schools in southwest Michigan – one urban, one suburban, and one rural school. Therefore, only three school principals who met a specific criteria and a sample of 17% of the teachers from the three school participated. My data was limited to: principal interviews, teacher questionnaires, and documents. Delimiting the study to just three schools in one geographic area means that other schools in this community and in other geographic locations were not included, which may

substantially limit transferability.

Using a video recorded presentation did compromise my ability to secure consent from teacher participants, since I was not at a staff meeting to answer questions. This meant that prospective participants needed to contact me for further information, and I believe that reduced the number of teachers who took the time to learn more so they could consider participation. Thus, the major limitation for this study was the limited participation by teachers in the teacher questionnaire.

Chapter III Summary

The third chapter describes the qualitative research methodology that used to explore how elementary school principals build a collaborative school culture that develops and facilitates teacher professionalism and autonomy through continuous growth and development. The research questions were identified and the population sample for the study are carefully described. The structure, validity, and reliability are also discussed in detail, and the methods of analysis for the research questions are explained. Chapters IV and V will present my results and conclusions of the study.

CHAPTER IV

CASE DESCRIPTIONS

This chapter will present the case descriptions developed from semi-structured interviews with school principals, as well as the findings of teacher data and document analysis within the case analysis. A detailed narrative description of each case will be presented around major themes and sub-themes followed by a cross-case analysis that highlights common and different themes present in the research findings.

Subject Participants

Three elementary school principals from different school districts and diverse communities in Southwest Michigan were selected for interviews. A nomination process was used to recruit principals from a list developed by key informants with knowledge of principals in that area. A number of individuals were recommended as principals who work with teachers to build a collaborative culture that supports teacher learning, leadership, and professional growth. Early in the summer of 2018, three qualified principal participants responded to my recruitment from a diverse selection of principals nominated by the key informants. Since all three respondents met all the study criteria outlined in the previous chapter, I accepted them as the participants for my study and identified each of the three principals and their schools as a single case for my study. After accepting them into my study, I collected several points of background information on each of the three principals. When I reviewed this background or demographic information from each principal (Table 1), I discovered that each had a background in a non-educational setting before going into the teaching profession; therefore, I need to acknowledge that, the information each participant shared and how they shared that information might be

influenced by experiences they had in non-educational settings. This coincidence of previous work experience in non-educational settings may limit transferability of my findings.

Table 1
Participant Data: 2018-2019

Participant Demographic	Principal One	Principal Two	Principal Three
Level of Ed	Master's degree Educational Technology & Educational Leadership	Master's degree in Educational Leadership	Master's degree in Educational Leadership; Working on her PhD
Other work experiences	Insurance company, television station	Theater and television production; paralegal for licensing music rights; Tai Chi Chuan	Restaurant and hotel management
Average Teaching Experience	15 years (K-6)	15 years (K-4 classroom); 2 years literacy coach	8 years (K-8)
Total Years as a School Principal	7 years	12 years - 3 as assistant principal; 9 as principal	12 years
Years as principal at the current school	7 years	12 years	4 years

In addition to the background information of each principal, the demographics of their schools might be another factor that influences their leadership goals and how they decide to achieve those goals. Principal Three has the largest student population and often referred to the use of coaches who would do follow-up to support teacher progress in meeting the needs of students. Principal Two had the second largest student population (400) and also had support from academic coaches. In the school with the smallest student population (267), the principal shared how an internal academic support was developed. Each principal had different levels of

district support, which influenced how they developed systems for continuous support to their teachers. Table 2 presents the profile of each participating principal's school.

Table 2
Demographics Information of the three Schools: 2017-2018

Demographics	School One	School Two	School Three
Location	Rural community in Southwest Michigan (approximately 7,700)	Urban district in Southwest Michigan (approximately 76,000)	Suburban community in Southwest Michigan (approximately 3,500)
Population of students	267	400	538
➢ White	82.4%	44%	89%
➢ Hispanic and African American	9.36%	31%	5.5%
➢ Economically disadvantaged (Student Percentage of Free and Reduced Lunch)	48%	82%	45%
➢ ELL	7%	32%	0%
All Staff	37	42	71
➢ Teachers	19	29	41
➢ Support Staff	4	4	15
➢ Bachelor's degree	7	10	23
➢ Master	12	17	18
➢ Specialist	0	2	0

With assistance from these principals and the teacher recruitment letter included in Appendix B, a number of teachers from each school were also recruited to participate in a video recorded presentation during which they completed an open-ended questionnaire. Five teachers from Principal One's school, nine teachers from Principal Two's school, and one teacher from Principal Three's school agreed to participate in this study. The goal was to gather data from at least 50% of the teaching staff from each school. However, in case one 26% participated, in case two 31% participated, while in case three only 2% participated. The participating teachers from

the first school were preschool, kindergarten, and second grade. The participating teachers from the second school were kindergarten, reading recovery-grade one, second grade, third grade, fourth grade, Physical Education (PE), special education for grades 3 to 5, and third/fourth combination. The participating teacher from the third school was pre-kindergarten.

The fact that I did not achieve the goal of having 50% of the teachers from each school participate resulted in a more limited picture of how teachers describe the leadership work of each principal, so I had to rely more on my interviews with the principals and shared documents of their work to develop an authentic picture of their leadership work. Through deep within case and cross-case analysis of all forms of data, I was further able to diminish the limitation created the low participation levels of teachers. It should also be noted that this low level of participation by teachers is more likely to be due to both the time of year during which I conducted the study and the fact that attending to another task (i.e. attending the voluntary meeting to watch the video explaining my study and responding to my study questionnaire) at a time when teachers are very pressed for time to complete all their required duties. I did not hear or see anything in my time in the schools that would suggest any other reason for their low level of participation in the questionnaire.

Data Collection Process

The data collection process for each case started with conducting an initial semi-structured interview in May and June of 2018. These interviews lasted 60 to 75 minutes with each principal, which gave them the opportunity to share how they engaged with teachers in a collaborative school culture that developed and facilitated teacher continuous learning and growth. Prior to each interview, the interview protocol with different sections of questions was emailed to the principals to review. (See Appendix E.) Principals were also asked to prepare any

documents that illustrated how they worked and interacted with teachers to develop their professional learning and growth related to the focus of this study. These documents assisted in developing a thicker description about the daily activities and work practices of the principals. During the first interview, the researcher gathered background information on each principal's education and experience. Each interview was conducted in-person with individual principals, based on their availability and preferences, and held in each individual's office or conference room.

Two follow-up interviews that ranged in length from 30 to 45 minutes were conducted with each principal in order to clarify and capture a clearer picture of the principal's work. Two follow-ups were conducted in June, and one each in August, September, October, and December of 2018. During these interviews, the researcher shared with each principal the final themes that developed through the analysis of the initial interview as a way to validate the findings and enrich the analysis. This provided the principals with an opportunity to check and correct any errors in the analyzed data, in order to confirm the results as a member checking strategy, which helped the researcher achieve a higher level of accuracy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Coding and Data Analysis

Each principal's interview was audio-recorded and transcribed for analytical purposes. I carefully transcribed the interviews verbatim and then analyzed them for themes, sub themes, and elements that best fit each case. I applied the guidelines for first and second cycle coding offered by The Coding Manual for Qualitative Research (Saldaña, 2013) to analyze all forms of data and develop codes, coding categories, and eventually, to confirm thematic elements from those categories. The major goal of coding was to capture the primary content or essence of the data. I began the coding process by reading and reviewing all the transcripts over multiple

rounds, highlighting major ideas and writing notes on activities, behavior, or strategies. Once I identified codes, I organized them into categories around major concepts and thematic elements the emerged from the data and confirmed the thematic elements within the coding categories by selecting salient passages and elements from the data. Stake (1995) articulated his own approach in data collection and analysis of case study research when he said, "The qualitative side of me looked for the emergence of meaning in the single instance" (p. 76). I applied Stake's approach by listening for what the data was saying and letting the thematic elements emerge. To complete the data analysis, I developed a set of focused codes that captured the common and significant ideas presented by principals (i.e. the prospective thematic elements); then, I continued to refined and revised that set of focused codes as new ideas emerged through the recursive rounds of interpreting the data (Saldaña, 2013).

The literature review offered insight surrounding principal leadership practices and I used that insight as a guide during a second cycle of coding to understand and begin to attach thematic meanings to the important ideas that crystallized through this cycle of coding. I also used other sources to refine my lens for second cycle coding. Moreover, I reviewed particular domains in the *Thoughtful Classroom Teacher Effectiveness Framework* and the *Framework for Teaching Evaluation Instrument* by Charlotte Danielson (2014) as a means bringing an informed lens about teacher growth and development to the analysis. Utilizing multiple sources during the process of coding and data analysis aided in determining the best way to organize the raw codes into categories and rational ways to interpret the meaning of these categories. I returned to the interview transcripts numerous times to search for confirming evidence and to pull out additional ideas and examples that would deepen the analysis process. Incorporating more cycles into the coding process enabled me to generate richer meanings, categories, themes, and concepts from

the data (Saldaña, 2013). I went through an iterative analysis process to develop an in-depth understanding into each principal's leadership approach to shaping a culture of shared leadership with a strong instructional focus. In addition, during the coding process, ongoing feedback on the coding and categorizing of data was offered by an academic reviewer with experience as a principal and varied perspective in education. The researcher and her academic adviser agreed on the final major themes and how they strongly aligned with sub-themes and elements.

I followed the same procedure to analyze the teacher questionnaire data for each case. The main focus of analyzing teacher data was to determine what teachers prioritized in their minds as important principal practices and how their responses aligned with what their school principal mentioned in the interviews. Finally, I conducted a cross-case analysis to compare and contrast the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data across the three cases. The next sections of this chapter will present a thick, rich description of each case.

Principal One - Case Description

Principal One has been leading a small school in a rural community in southwest Michigan that serves a diverse population of approximately 267 students in kindergarten through fifth grade who come from various socioeconomic backgrounds. Hispanic and African American students make up approximately 9.36% of the student body, while 82.4% of students are White. 48% of students in the school are economically disadvantaged as indicated by free and reduced lunch statistics, and nearly 93% speak English as their first language. These students are supported by 19 teachers, of whom seven hold a Bachelor’s degree and 12 hold Master’s degrees. They have an average teaching experience of approximately 10 years.

Principal One had worked at an insurance company and in broadcasting at a television station prior to beginning her teaching certification through a community college; then, a four-

year university. Prior to becoming a principal, this principal taught kindergarten for three years in small city and has a total of 15 years of experience as a classroom teacher across different grade levels. While teaching, Principal One earned a Master's degree in Educational Technology then another Master's in Educational Leadership because of a strong desire to be a principal. After receiving an Educational Leadership degree, a school administrator encouraged her to apply to other school districts to become a principal. The application process led to a district that offered a principal position in one of their smaller schools where Principal One has been for the last seven years.

Presentation of Themes and Sub-Themes

Four major themes emerged as the essential activities and behaviors that Principal One has used to build a collaborative school culture that empowers teachers to be more professional and autonomous through continuous learning and growth. The major themes show that this principal:

1. Promotes a growth mindset and continuous professional development as the foundation of the school culture
2. Uses the teacher evaluation system to promote professional learning and growth.
3. Focuses the school culture on supporting teacher collaboration and promoting the philosophy of vulnerability, honesty, and humility to acknowledge the need for continuous learning and growth
4. Recognizes the importance of sharing leadership with teachers and supporting their professional autonomy, which empowers them to grow as a leader

These themes are supported with sub-themes and elements that were expressed by the principal, teachers at the school and, in some cases, documentation.

Theme 1: Promoting a Growth Mindset And Continuous Professional Development as The Foundation of The School Culture

Principal One holds a strong philosophy about teacher learning and continuous growth. She expects teachers to be continuous learners who fully embrace the belief that they can learn and improve their teaching capacities. She said, "I want [teachers] to have a continuous improvement frame of mind because you can't grow if you don't have that." Without a growth mindset, the principal believes that teachers will not achieve continuous improvement in their teaching pathway. Hence, teachers are encouraged by the principal to incorporate a growth mindset (i.e. a belief in the capacity for continuous growth rather than fixed capacity for growth [Dweck, 2000])

The principal realizes the importance of learning right along with teachers to support their search for better ways of teaching. She relates to teachers and acknowledges their struggles by reflecting on her own teaching experience. When teachers struggle with learning and development, the principal understands that it is a normal stage to the path of improving professional practices. "I taught four different grade levels, so I know what it means to teach… So, when they explain that they are struggling with something, I can empathize with them… I understand you're supposed to struggle." Continuous learning and growth of all teachers in order to meet the needs of students is the foundation of this principal's leadership philosophy and practices.

Sub-theme A: Encouraging teachers to use the teaching and learning cycle to consider new ways of teaching. The principle highlighted the importance of using the teaching and learning cycle to ensure high quality professional practices of teachers that facilitated learning for all students. "Evaluating how well [teachers] teach, make plans for instruction, do the instruction and reflect afterwards, in order to assess if the children learned, and if they didn't

learn, what [the teacher] will do for the kids who didn't learn, and plan new instruction then evaluate the entire process and start all over again. And, just keep going."

The principal encourages each teacher to begin with planning what must be taught while considering student abilities and learning styles. Carefully planned lessons are then conducted and are followed by considering what was taught, how it was taught, and the engagement of the students. Through this type of reflection, the principal feels that teachers can focus on student success and additional needs along with which teaching strategies worked and which did not. This leads to the next round of planning, teaching and evaluating. She expects this ongoing process of assessment, evaluation, planning, and teaching to guide teachers in adapting their teaching style and making professional instructional decisions that meet the diverse learning needs of students. It became evident that focusing on the teaching and learning cycle was important in offering "differentiated instruction and teaching students where they're at and what skill level they need."

In addition to having conversations with teachers regarding teaching and learning, the principal explained how the multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) is used within the school. Her focus was on Tier 1, where all classroom teachers focus on the teaching and learning cycle for introducing and developing the required curriculum. Differentiation of lessons and assessments followed by conversations with other grade-level teachers and specialists that focus on student progress are essential. She added that remediation and assistance can be provided at Tiers 2 and 3 with the assistance of specialists or paraprofessionals, but the classroom teachers must be able to explain what has been taught, how they have taught it, and what the students are struggling with. Teachers have learned to blend the teaching/learning cycle into MTSS, so "now, we're focusing on [this first tier in] a different way."

Considering that classroom teachers are the foundation of the learning process, their abilities in selecting and implementing teaching and learning strategies that meet the needs of a whole classroom of students is key to each student's academic success. The principal believes reflective practice engages teachers in a continuous examination of their teaching, student learning, and other improvements to better meet student needs. In this way, teachers are able to build a stronger growth mindset. As the principal stated, "I think [a reflective teacher] is somebody who considers their practice and has a philosophy of continuous improvement and good growth, or what I am calling 'growth mindset.' Without that, they are not reflective, and they're very difficult to move [forward]." Therefore, the principal continually focuses her efforts on promoting the growth mindset in teachers through providing them with learning opportunities that change their own identities as learners. Teachers agreed that the principal truly challenges them to be reflective; they shared in the Teacher Questionnaire that she constantly encourages teachers to be reflective and make changes in their classroom practices in order to better serve their students. According to one teacher, we continually consider "ideas/resources that address our [self-improvement] plans."

Using constant conversations with teachers. The principal prioritizes the importance of holding conversations with teachers that allow them to be reflective in a way that promotes meaningful improvements in teaching practices. Ongoing or constant conversations help teachers understand where to focus their efforts and what steps they should take to improve their practices. She views these conversations as an essential task: "There's not a month that goes by where [teachers] don't see me and have a conversation about what they're teaching and how they're teaching. So, it's just the practice. It's regular. It's frequent." This strategy stems from the principal's belief that teachers cannot grow professionally if they do not receive formative

feedback that is meaningful and applicable to their daily teaching practice; thus, her main goal is to "be in each classroom at least once a week or every two weeks, and then give teachers feedback immediately afterward, whether it's written feedback or conversation. And when time permits, I prefer to have a conversation."

The principal shared reflective conversations that she had over several months with a teacher who did not understand the necessity of planning her instruction using ongoing assessment and reflection. That is, the teacher would refer to her teaching as being on Lesson 2 today and continuing onto Lesson 3 tomorrow. No key questions had been identified to promote student engagement or to assess whether or not students truly understood. The teacher did not reflect on how the lesson had been taught or if the students were involved in meaningful learning. During these constant conversations, the principal attempted to highlight the changes that should be made in teaching while encouraging the teacher to try new teaching practices.

> We had conversations in September, October, and November, and she kept promising. "I promise I'm going to try this new thing. I really want to." Well, if you really want to, you probably should do it. Finally, in December, she still did nothing. And that's four months of nothing. So I just said, "You've done four months of nothing." And she was offended, but she needed to know that what she said she was doing, she wasn't doing it. And, she didn't care whether she did it or not. But for me, it was important because it was detrimental to the kids.

When nothing occurred to change or even improve her teaching practices, the principal had difficult conversations where she reviewed student data during these four months. This provided a complete and clear picture of the teacher's teaching performance.

> So I had to tell her. “You think this is happening, but here is what's really happening.” I showed her data from all four months. But that didn't work. So, finally, I had to be very blunt with her, and not worry about her crying or whatever might happen to her and her mind or her emotions and just be straight with her because being kind did not work. So finally she got up and left and told me she was never going back to my office again.

Using constant conversation with peers. Conversations with the principal are not the only approach that can develop a growth mindset or improve the teaching and learning cycle. The principal encourages reflective conversations with peers who hold high levels of teaching expectations, whether in the grade level team meetings or in the lunchroom, in order to share best practices and draw on others for support. Some peers are constantly striving to change and improve practices while others do not prioritize improving practices. Negativity breeds negativity, which the principal believes can hinder good reflective conversations among peers. “Having conversations with other teachers who don't have a philosophy of self-reflection can enhance negativity... And then, that breeds kind of like a virus.” By acknowledging the influence that peers create on reflective thinking, the principal takes that into consideration when creating situations or opportunities for teachers to interact and collaborate. She understands that her role is to facilitate peer conversations that breed honest reflection, identify needs of students, and employ teaching and learning strategies that lead to higher levels of student achievement.

Encouraging teachers to see themselves as learners. The principal supports continuous learning by encouraging teachers to try new practices and never stop growing and learning. This means focusing on supporting teachers' passions about teaching and continuous improvement that can drive them to work harder, learn along the way, and achieve more than they had ever accomplished before. The principal always focuses on supporting teachers’ passions when

setting and reviewing long-term goals. As she stated, “I usually ask teachers what it is that they want to learn [what things they need to learn about] and what will sustain them for years, not just for the upcoming year, but what is their passion. Then, I try to find opportunities [that they are passionate about].” In this way, teachers participate in setting their own professional goals and usually determine the next step that they want to work on and improve. The principal considers the importance of challenging teachers to become risk takers to focus on more difficult aspects of teaching and student learning when setting goals and keep trying until they get better, “Typically I don't let them [teachers] choose anything that is too easy. And they have to be able to explain why they chose their goal.” Sometimes, teachers are encouraged to keep the same goals over several years, but they need to polish and improve their practices.

> Sometimes it [a goal] stays; their goals stay the same for years. But, they're just polishing it to make it better because that's what they're passionate about. And a lot of times, it's almost like you don't know what you don't know. So, when you start to know something, you have this much knowledge. But then, when you learn more about it, you're like, “Oh, my gosh, there's this much more that I don't know. So I get this big and then there's that much more I still don't know”… and showing them [teachers] where they were when they started to where they are now helps them see their growth so that they keep trying to get better.

Creating a space for new ideas. The principal provides teachers with opportunities to try new approaches to teaching, which encourages risk taking without worrying about making mistakes. At the beginning of the school year, a pair of teachers conducted a research study where they took all the children in a grade level and put them into groups according to academic level. The more experienced teacher taught the group with lower academic skills, and the other

teacher taught the children with higher skills. She acknowledged that the teachers were going to try the research study for the first time as professional development. She shared several times that the new project provided rich conversations that focused on student learning, the success of the experiment, and possible professional development for next year. Therefore, from her perspective, the teachers were "going to try it and see if it worked. We had no idea what was going to happen." The principal indicated that she makes it a priority to provide teachers with opportunities to try new ideas, whether the idea is successful or not. In this way, she promotes a growth mindset. The principal discussed how she has been open and supportive to new ideas, as she stated, "I do allow teachers…if they're on school improvement team or they come to me and they have an idea…I will ask them…[to] show me how this will work. So if it's their idea and they want to develop it and they want to try something, I will let them."

To further promote the practice of encouraging teachers to identify new strategies for maximizing student achievement, the principal shared areas of need with the school improvement teams. In one case, all school staff members met to discuss the new Michigan third grade reading law, which requires that a third grade student reach a designated level of reading proficiency before being promoted to fourth grade. The principal gave teachers the professional autonomy to lead the discussions and work collaboratively to brainstorm different ideas and then identify one or two ideas that would tie what teachers knew about their students and current teaching practices to the new requirements. She supported the teachers' ideas by finding the research and exploring results to determine the benefits of implementing the identified teaching strategies. In reflecting on what had happened, the principal shared:

> Well, there was one statement at the beginning of the meeting that said, we cannot continue to do what we've always done. And we all agreed. Yes, that's true. Then they

> started asking each other questions. I just stood back and watched this happen. It was awesome… like they brainstormed a whole bunch of ideas. Then, they took one of the ideas they all appreciated, and they started developing it. Well they developed everything so much that we're going to try it next year. And, it is kind of backwards from what I normally do. What I normally do is I will research something and then propose it. Well, this time they came up with the idea. Now I had to find the research to back it up... I found a book that just came out in April of 2018 from the McREL and SCD, and it has exactly the blueprints for what I needed to do. So I will buy that book.

Subtheme B: Providing continuous support that facilitates teachers' professional growth. The principal takes an active role in modeling, facilitating, and leading professional development activities. She tries to model learning for others as she participates in activities that encourage trying and exploring something new beyond the school setting. To create a school culture of continuous growth, she stated, "…modeling. I have been to a lot of professional development myself this year... It's good for me to come back with, 'Hey, I learned this in someplace and this is a good thing to try.'"

In addition to modeling learning, the principal also takes on the role of instructional coach. Her main goal is to provide teachers with continuous support along with challenging them through professional development to improve their teaching practices. In the same way, by using modeling and support, she expects teachers to challenge their students. "We want to continue to always challenge children, but we also want to offer them the support that they need, and the same also for the teachers. So some teachers are more gifted than others in instruction and relationships, and wherever they need the support that's where I come in and coach them a lot."

Since the school district recently adopted a new math curriculum, the principal conducts professional development training for teachers because she has been working as a math coach. This has meant teaching math across the district to all different grade level teachers: fifth and fourth grade at the same time, second and third grade at the same time, and first and kindergarten at the same time. However, this has been challenging, as it was a new learning that teachers had not tried before. Therefore, she provides continuous support through professional development in order to prepare teachers for the challenges associated with adopting a new math curriculum.

> I wanted it to be continuous… so that as they [teachers] were learning these skills, they could build upon those skills and become better at teaching the math because they had never used this curriculum before and they had a lot of questions about how it works and how to make it work better.

In addition, this year there was a series of professional development activities led by teachers. One session addressed visual learning. A team of three teachers learned about visual cues of engagement and practiced strategies in order to share the information about materials and strategies with the entire school staff during a four-hour professional development presentation. This was followed by another group of three teachers who built on the previous team's experiences by presenting other strategies to engage students in learning. This allowed for the layering of new ideas and teaching strategies through professional development.

Challenging teachers to lead learning activities. Within professional development activities, the principal encourages teachers to take new challenges in leading learning and development activities. Teachers are often very reluctant to try something new that would improve their teaching practices. "The teachers I chose [to lead the PD series] were the ones who would be uncomfortable… because it's nothing they would have volunteered for on their own.

And, I gave them the option to say no. Well, it was implied. I didn't say, 'You may choose no.' I invited them, and they chose to do it." Another professional development strategy the principal promotes involves teachers inviting peers into their classroom. For this, she challenges experienced teachers to invite staff members into the classroom to observe instructional practices. This has led to a remarkable change in teaching practices:

> In the past, their [experienced teacher] instruction was inconsistent and after having that experience [inviting peers to their classroom] their instruction has become much better. And I think a lot of it has to do with the growing process of opening your door and letting 20 strangers come in and watch you teach. And I also think because …they had to teach three times this year …they learned … that you have to teach something that you've learned to become even better at it. So, I have noticed, remarkably, when I go into at least two of their classrooms that they're much more successful and much more consistent than they had been in the past.

Another time when the principal challenges reluctant experienced teachers occurs when mentors are required for new, or struggling, teachers. She challenged experienced teachers to use their professional learning to be a mentor. Often, new teachers were given equal opportunities to choose their own mentor based on personal preference, but this requires a variety of mentors from whom to choose. The principal realizes that giving struggling teachers the opportunity to choose a mentor can increase a positive feeling of responsibility toward their own professional learning and development, which in turn can increase their level of motivation for learning to improve student achievement.

In some cases, the principal assigns the mentor based on a teacher's needs. "I have assigned mentors before. I have seven mentors in my building. Which is very good especially

when I get new staff. Sometimes, I put a reluctant leader with a new person…" She feels this may be challenging to the mentor in the beginning, but it has been very effective, and the mentees have demonstrated growth.

Providing ongoing support through professional development. No matter what a teacher's level of proficiency is, the principal believes that teachers need ongoing opportunities that will increase their motivation for learning and professional growth. The principal considers it important to provide coaching support whether teachers are new or experienced, or whether their proficiency scores are high or not. "…My teachers are proficient, and that's why I don't get coaching support [from an outside source], because… their scores are good… that's not fair." The principal believes that all teachers deserve coaches, so she has created her own system of peer coaching instead of waiting for the school district to provide the system they planned to implement six years ago. This decision was driven by principal's belief that her teachers possess high levels of knowledge and skills that they can use if they are empowered to participate in peer coaching. "I think my staff, my teachers need extra support, and they're not getting it, so I'm going to create the experts… And, I think they already exist. They just don't realize they have the talent to do it." Therefore, the principal has taken the responsibility to create her own coaching system and empower strong teachers to become experts who can train others informally:

> I'm going to use a fourth grade and a second grade teacher... I'm going to train these two teachers to start coaching the teachers in our building informally, and they won't get paid extra. But, they will get the extra training, and they can use it on their resume if they need to go to another building or leave and go to another town. But I'm not waiting any longer for them [the district] to develop the system.

Subsequently, the principal set peer observations on the calendar where every two weeks

a group of teachers gets the opportunity to visit other classrooms. Teachers are encouraged to choose the appropriate time for observations during the two weeks, and the principal will cover their classrooms.

> My own system of peer coaching is going to work out fabulously. Every two weeks, a group of teachers gets the chance to visit other classrooms. So, they have two-week blocks where they can choose any time they want to go. I... teach their class while they go and do peer observations. And it's more frequent because I had only intended to give them two chances this year.

The principal is working to increase the frequency of peer observations, from one opportunity to ten, to enable teachers to be in each other's classrooms more frequently and see the growth from one time to the next. She wants teachers be more involved in each other's classrooms almost as much as she is. Through these observations, teachers are able to not only observe what other teachers were doing, but because the observations happen more frequently than originally planned, the teachers are able to see the growth in their peers.

Providing choices for professional development activities. Until this school year, teachers were not given opportunities to choose their own professional development program because the only things provided were the building professional devolvement and the district wide professional development that all teachers get. However, the principal recognized that allowing teachers to learn only teaching practices based on grade level needs may not help them grow and develop skills and strategies to best meet the needs of their students. The principal's previous school district gave her the liberty to choose what she wanted for professional development, and if it was something that was expensive she had to write a statement as to what was learned and how that could be used to benefit the rest of the staff. This drove the principal to

make changes that enabled teachers to make their own choices. She began by working with the new Director of Curriculum and Instruction and offered a lot of suggestions, which included stipends for teachers. The new Director listened, was open-minded, and accepted some of her suggestions. She acknowledges the importance of working with someone who seeks improvement and encourages ideas from others:

> When there's something I think of, I'll send her [the Director] an email and ask to meet with her to see if we can discuss a new way of looking at things. And sometimes she'll say, "Not yet. It's not time yet." Sometimes she'll say, "Can you give me more details. Find the research on it?" And I already did before I decided to meet with her, so I just send it to her, and it takes her a while to look at it because she's busy, too. But, she's very receptive to anything that I put. Even crazy stuff... Now that I look back at it, I'm like that was a dumb idea, but she'll still entertain the thought. So that's good.

Subsequently, the school district is implementing a menu of professional learning options where teachers and paraprofessionals are given choices based on their needs and interests.

> The curriculum director changed the format that we normally have, which is three choices, and that's it. This summer there were 11 choices, and the teachers could choose whichever learning opportunity they wanted. And they were given a stipend for the day for attending the professional development. It worked out to be like $120…Because it's hard to get subs during the school year when the kids are in school, and so what we did is we took the sub cost that we would have spent during school and gave it to them [the teachers] in the summer. So they got to put it in their pocket instead of paying a substitute teacher and missing time with their class. So, I really think in the analysis of cost benefit,

it benefits the teachers better. And, they are more motivated to go learn. And, I think we might have found the way to get teachers excited about professional learning.

Overall, the principal has dedicated a great portion of the in-school professional learning to cultivating a growth mindset in teachers. She gives teachers more choices and a voice in PD activities, and provides professional learning that takes a continuous improvement approach to teacher development that is job-embedded. As acknowledged in the Teacher Questionnaire, the principal is supportive in providing teachers with opportunities and funding to attend additional PD training. One teacher shared, "The principal shares/offers PD that she feels will benefit us… [And she] participates with us in PD's… finding money to support additional PD in areas of passion/interest."

Subtheme C: Supporting changes to create a positive learning environment. The principal feels it is extremely important to promote professional growth, and this is powerful when paired with promoting a culture of professional learning where individuals are encouraged to adopt a posture of humility and admit the need for growth and continuous learning. The principal has created a collaborative learning culture that centers on building a school-wide growth mindset. In order to accomplish that, she has changed the school culture from closed doors to open doors. "I came from a school where all the doors were open, and it was normal for us to coach each other and help each other in teaching. When I came here, I was surprised because I'd never been in a school where doors were closed... And it took a long time to build the trust so [teachers] would open their doors." The principal realizes changing the school culture should start with getting into classrooms and holding constant conversations with teachers. However, making the change was not easy, as the principal acknowledged:

> The first year was very hard because I started the first week in people's classrooms, which was something they had never been accustomed to. And, they had never been accustomed to the conversation. They thought the conversation was going to be something to worry about I guess. They thought that it would reflect on their evaluation, and it does ultimately. But, that's not the point of the conversation. The point of the conversation is we are all growing. It's hard. Change is hard and to know that you could do something better… It's just being humble and knowing that you're not there yet.

The principal wants teachers to view the process of evaluation as part of a growth mindset, formative rather than summative, so they become more motivated to grow with humility to achieve better teaching practices. In this way, they can see themselves as learners. This strategy involves providing teachers with formative, ongoing feedback as crucial element in engaging them in this growth-oriented process. The principal recognizes that conversations about teaching is the most impactful approach, one she needs to use constantly rather than focusing heavily on teacher evaluations. “Conversations are the most important. We have an evaluation tool that is pretty much just a tracking device for recording scores. That doesn't help at all. A lot of my peers complain about it not working. And I tell them that you have to use it differently. You have to use the conversations.” By providing suggestions to the other principals, this principal demonstrated how much she values these constant conversations as a crucial component of supporting a growth mindset in her teachers.

The principal has focused her efforts on building respectful conversations that encourage teachers to openly ask critical questions, provide honest feedback on flaws, and decide what to work on to become better educators.

> It took a long, long time of trying to build a respectful conversation. [In the beginning], when I was talking or asking the questions, they [teachers] would always think that I was being mean when I would find something to give them feedback on. I could find one flaw or something they needed to work on instantly, and they were upset because nobody had told them that they weren't perfect.

Through substantive conversations, the principal provides meaningful feedback to encourage teachers to use reflective thinking to change or confirm their practices. She recognizes that identifying the strengths of each teacher, what motivates or discourages them, and how to approach them with constructive criticism, are all-essential. "It took a long time to learn each teacher and their strengths and then how to approach them with constructive criticism."

Along with professional conversations, the principal has adopted a new view of classroom visits, or as she calls them "learning walks," one that is formative rather than evaluative. The principal realizes that as she utilizes learning walks more frequently, the more teachers regularly evaluate their own practices. The more she observes and talks about practice, the better teachers are prepared to make and lead change. She explained:

> The more frequent the learning walks are, the more responsible [teachers] are. And, when it's frequent, and you get that frequent feedback, they have more time for reflection. And also, it's right here. And so they can go back and … compare where they've come from and see the growth. I think when they see growth it improves their instruction a lot.

The principal believes that teacher professional growth is unlikely if immediate and specific feedback is not provided where areas of growth are needed. Observing classrooms more frequently than required is necessary for facilitating the professional growth of each individual teacher. "Usually I'm only required to do three [times a year]. I usually do about eight learning

walks… [Teachers need continuous support] more frequently because there's no way you can grow if you don't get enough feedback…they need as much as possible."

Theme 2: Incorporates Teacher Evaluation System to Promote Professional Learning and Growth

The principal has worked intensively on teacher evaluation as a vehicle for professional learning and growth. Her main goal centers on providing teachers with professional development opportunities that target their passions and areas where growth is desired, but the law and the district have set specific requirements for teacher observation and evaluation. The evaluation system requires that principals have a pre-observation meeting with a teacher, conduct an observation of teaching using a formal checklist then hold a post-observation meeting where strengths and weaknesses are discussed and targets or goals are set. Teachers are often encouraged to go through a cycle of evaluations and professional learning to improve their effectiveness and accelerate growth in areas that lead to increased student achievement. She believes that prioritizing frequent classroom visits and conversations has laid a foundation for giving credible, non-evaluative feedback that supports ongoing learning and builds an individual's capacity for success. Thus, she goes beyond the basic evaluation system and prefers to work more closely and actively with teachers in classrooms as an enjoyable aspect of her work. "When I'm here, I am in the classroom all the time. That's what makes me happy, and helping teachers is what makes me happy."

Subtheme A: Previous learning walks and conversations influence the formal evaluation process. As earlier noted, the principal uses frequent classroom observations throughout the school year as a crucial strategy to develop teacher instructional capacity and professional growth. In some cases, if a teacher needs additional assistance, the principal creates

a system to observe that teacher more frequently and allocates additional time for discussion and self-refection that opens the teacher's mind to possible changes.

> Sometimes, I have to set up a regimen of observe-talk-observe-talk for like three months. It takes a long time, but it's every two weeks because that gives me time to get in and watch. It also gives them time to change their practice…We focus on one objective. It's like you would have a kid… You have to focus on just one. Let's master this and move on to the next thing [skill]. It's hard. It's tedious. It's boring. But it's necessary to help teachers get better.

By blending information shared during learning walks and conversations with the more formal documentation checklist, the principal can track proficiency and then provide specific feedback in the areas where improvement is needed. Open conversation after learning walks build a foundation for the more comprehensive, formal teacher evaluation that focuses on self-evaluation and ensures continual improvement and better teaching practices.

Fostering meaningful growth around targeted areas. During the first weeks of school, teachers set, or reset, goals related to targeted areas of improvement. The principal works with teachers to create individual goals and determine areas for growth that spark conversations and reflections on practice. "Monthly, I have a meeting with individual teachers to talk about their data and their goals. Just to check in. So, it's always in the forefront of their mind of what it is they're trying to accomplish… Usually they [teachers] are the ones who choose ... what it is that they want to improve. Sometimes, I have to help them. Most of the time they know… They set their own goals… It's their choice."

The principal encourages teachers to regularly review their professional goals, and most importantly, to be mindful and aware of their purposes and goals.

> They [teachers] look at their past teaching practices and those results, and then they set goals for what they want to accomplish next… Most of the time with reflective teachers, it's easy. It's easier than with less reflective teachers. It's difficult because they pick a goal that is too easy or something that's not important. This is because they don't understand what important is. So, we have to have that conversation. Sometimes it works, but a lot of times, it just does not work. So, I end up writing the goal and having them agree to it, because they just can't do it themselves. But usually after a couple unsuccessful trials, …if they still can't come up with something, what I do is I say, "Oh, your neighbor over here is doing this. Maybe you should try that."

If a teacher is not demonstrating improvement, the principal helps or supports teachers in developing a self-improvement plan with target areas. This is usually woven into the formal teacher evaluation process and engages teachers in identifying areas for improving teaching and learning in their classrooms.

> Before the end of the first month of school, [teachers] make their plan and start working on it. In addition to that the teachers who are ineffective, or minimally effective, have that additional plan… Everybody has two plans. One is a professional plan. So, it's your own, and you choose how you want to develop. … The other one is a data-based plan. It's kind of a study to see if your instruction is reaching the students you need to reach. So, it's a data-focused growth plan. [But if a teacher is ineffective, or minimally effective], a third plan of remediation for teachers [becomes part of the formal teacher evaluation process.

Identifying the focus of the observations. The principal works collaboratively with teachers to identify specific targeted areas and goals then discusses the focus of the formal observation. The principal explained:

> We use a recording sheet with boxes for collecting goal-based evidence… and recording our conversation… What am I looking for? What did I see? What are the next steps that we agreed on? So, they know… when I'm going to come in and what I will see next time I observe. And then [on the sheet], what did I see? And what are the next steps? … Just so I can see growth. For some of them, their big thing is engagement, like student engagement, and sometimes, it's really low and all they want is to improve it by 15% or improve it by 50% if it is really bad."

The principal also explained the importance of being a committed listener and understand in order to determine the next steps based on teachers' professional needs.

> When I have conversations with them, usually they do all the talking, and I just listen and ask some questions, and then I listen. And, sometimes, I just repeat what they said but say it differently until I see a light bulb go off, and I see that we've made a connection. Then I know I understand what they're saying because sometimes they're communicating something, and I have my own idea of what they just said… So, you have to be a very good listener and … really need to understand what it is they said so that you can prescribe the right next steps for them, and lead them to whatever it is that they want to learn. I don't always know what they want to get better at, so I usually learn from the conversation.

Through these pre-observation conversations, the principal and teacher use the *Look For* document to identify areas that align with the teacher's target goals. The principal tries to observe teachers twice a month using *Look Fors* identified during the pre-observation meeting and indicators on the evaluation checklist. The principal shared, "One [observation] per month focuses on *The Thoughtful Classroom* [required by the district]," when teachers are encouraged

to choose the cornerstone areas where they need the most help. She continued, “Then, one time per month [focuses on] curricular issues and then sometimes engagement… So they know what I’m looking for and how to track it.”

When using *The Thoughtful Classroom*, the principal slows down, observes student engagement in the learning process, looks at their work, and listens carefully to the teacher. The ongoing focus is determining how the strengths and weaknesses of each teacher’s practices impact student learning and what kinds of support that teacher needs.

> When I get into a classroom, and I'm there for about 20 to 30 minutes, usually I can tell what's happening in the classroom and can help. You can see the children learning, and if the children are not learning, and if they're not, then you have to figure out what's causing that. So, it is here I have to look to see if it is a curriculum problem or a question of engagement. Is it classroom management? Are the kids all crazy and just yelling out and acting like fools? Or, is it maybe that they're missing a skill? ... So, once I find the skills, I will celebrate the skills that are working, then help them develop the skills that are not working. When it comes down to that, I'm able to tell from their outcome data if the skill that I chose is accurate and if the outcome data changes. If it doesn't change, then I need to go back and see what it is that I need to help that teacher develop.

The principal shared documents as to how she records learning walks and keeps a summary page for each teacher in a folder. The recording sheet reports conversations with teachers and determines the next steps that they need to work on, which enables the principal to quickly track progress on the attainment of target areas of growth, including student learning objectives and professional learning goals.

> So, this is where the evaluation process comes in because I keep track of what it is they're learning, and what I saw during this observation. Then [during the post-observation meeting,] I report what we've learned and then what it is that we want to try next time. …I keep data... Now, we have a conversation about what I saw, and they decide what they want to learn... We just keep going the whole year.

Providing this type of ongoing evaluation system requires organization on the part of the principal. Because the principal has worked to get teachers to open their doors for frequent learning walks and conversations, formal evaluations are based on more than a one-time visit to a teacher's classroom. The principal uses Post-It notes weekly and places them in each teacher's file to ensure that she is observing each of them equitably. The principal uses this technique in her planning book to track visits throughout the week by crossing off the teachers who have been observed unless there are some teachers who need extra attention and more support.

Follow-up to observations. The principal spends time with teachers and looks for ways to improve their teaching practices. She expects teachers to improve their approach to teaching, and if a teacher is not showing improvement, a plan is implemented and monitored until the teacher demonstrates growth. The principal described a situation where she worked for about three years to improve the skills of a teacher without success. She brought the problem to the teacher's attention and encouraged her to think critically on how to address improving her teaching skills.

> Sometimes, I have teachers who are on a professional plan because they are abysmal; their teaching skills are horrible. I have worked with one for about three years and gotten nowhere. And finally, …I figured out what the problem was. I brought it to her attention and spoke with her. "So, here's what I think the problem is. I need you to figure out what to do with it because I can't change things in your classroom. Only you can." She asked

> to go watch another teacher. She watched three other teachers, and then she also wanted professional development in the summer… She improved so much she doesn't need an improvement plan anymore. In fact, she could probably teach others… That's like my big pride and joy.

However, when teachers fail to meet the minimum standard of effectiveness, the principal has offered assistance along with observing them more frequently. A mentor is offered who will observe their practices once or twice a month based on their effectiveness level. The principal and mentor use a common document to observe a teacher and offer feedback on what has improved and what still needs attention.

> When a teacher is either minimally effective or ineffective, I have to give them a plan. So first, I have to list all the deficiencies they are not good at and describe them. Then, I have to tell them specifically what's going wrong… and offer them assistance. Usually, I offer them a mentor. I also meet with them by-weekly. I look at parent contacts, lesson plans, student growth records, and I also tell them that they have to be observed by their mentor teacher... These [plans] are not negotiable. If they are borderline, then we can come to a conclusion … to meet with your mentor once a month… I will see you twice a month on opposite weeks… but it's not punitive. It's more for your benefit so you can learn quicker, and you will improve faster.

When teachers are not making the necessary growth to improve teaching practices, the principal needs to remove them. An example that was discussed in Theme 1 is when the principal worked intensively with the teacher and held constant conversations, but after working with the teacher, "…she decided to find a job someplace else."

Sub-theme B: Stimulating reflective thinking and positive actions through ongoing conversation. The learning environment created by the principal relied on ongoing communication. She has realized that meeting teachers in their classrooms is a better way for discussing teaching practices and supporting personal growth. "Typically I prefer one-on-one conversation. If I'm short on time, it is email…But, e-mail is not used very often. Normally I go see them for 15 minutes… The conversation is way more important."

Providing teachers with relevant data on their instruction and encourages using formative assessment of student learning. The principal often discusses with teachers different formative assessments, for example, annotated notes, and grade books, and asks critical questions that encourage reflection on the evidence of student learning.

> I usually ask them [teachers] to explain it [the evidence of student learning] to me. What are we looking at? And ask them what their feelings are. What's your hunch about why this is this way? And how did this happen? Those type of questions. Because they know better than I do. I have no idea. I don't know how the students were feeling that day, or I don't know how they taught that lesson. A lot of times, I'm not there to watch it. So, they have to explain to me what happened.

The principal also provides other types of formative data to ensure that students are learning what has been taught, such as student interviews on the learning.

> I asked students a lot about what they're learning. Do they feel prepared for this learning? If they're doing an independent learning activity, I asked them how successful they think they're going to be at this and why. Like if you think you're going to be very successful why do you think you're going to be very successful, or the opposite. Why do you feel that this is difficult or too hard?

The principal usually takes detailed notes while observing and uses student data as the basis for her conferences with teachers. The conversation and evidence allow teachers to reflect and identify specific areas for improvement. For instance, the principal conducted an engagement study where she paid close attention to what was keeping students from learning. Based on data, she worked with teachers to determine the particular skills or strategies that can successfully turn a classroom around.

> A couple of times this year, I did an engagement study. So, I marked what percentage of the students were paying attention for five minutes. …And, afterwards, I asked the teacher, "How do you think things went today?" She thought they went great… So, I said, "Well, I'm going to give this to you. I will come see you tomorrow after you have had some time to look it over and then we will talk about it." …She was surprised because she was not aware of those things… After that conversation, she did make some changes, because she realized some of the things she was doing ... She easily identified for herself what the problems were. I did not have to identify them because it was all there in the data.

Engaging teachers in coaching conversations. The principal converses with teachers in a way that opens a space for deep reflection on instructional practices. Rather than informing teachers about the practices or areas that are noticed in the classroom, she employs reflective questions to encourage them be accountable for their own progress. The principal discussed the conversations that she holds with teachers as "More of a coaching conversation rather than me telling them what's happening in their classroom. I ask them a series of questions to help them think about their instruction and facilitate their thinking because they have the answers, and it's better when they come up with their own solutions than if I come up with their solutions."

The principal focuses on collaborative conversations as a strategy for active participation, where teachers are encouraged to discuss their own professional practices. However, some teachers consider teaching as a personal passion and not a professional practice, which has made reflective thinking difficult.

> I'd rather it be a collaborative conversation where we're both working together. Mostly I want to understand what they were thinking and how I might influence their thinking in a way that helps them engage more in their practice. A lot of times though, when I have tried to make a clear distinction between "this is not personal" and "this is your practice," they don't understand because it's very personal. Teaching is very personal to them because it is an extension of themselves, and they put so much time into it.

The principal realizes that engaging teachers in reflective, professional conversation requires them to feel safe, secure, and comfortable. "It's [conversation] always in their room and not in my office. When it's in my office, my office has a bad vibe. Sometimes they're confrontational conversations, and I don't like that in my office… Yes, it is on their turf, in their rooms, so they feel more secure and safe. I want them to feel safe. I don't want them to feel insecure or intimidated."

The principal understands that change is not achieved easily, and those going through the change process require support, which may take different forms. She has worked to create an open learning environment. Throughout the process, she has relied on being visible during daily walk-throughs and conversations. In response to the teacher questionnaire, teachers described how much they value learning walks that the principal employs throughout the year and always makes time to meet with teachers to discuss what was observed and how to improve instructional practices. "We meet with her to go over walk-throughs and evaluations, and she questions us to

help with reflection… Her questioning techniques support personal growth…. and give positive feedback during evaluation meetings." Teachers also value the way the principal holds conversations with the teaching staff, asks reflective questions, and offers feedback that enhance their personal growth and development.

In describing the principal during this process, teachers stated, "The principal is open to meet anytime throughout the year… [and] she is always willing to offer suggestions." Ongoing conversations, feedback, and support track individual progress toward meeting goals. According to the teachers, "Bi-yearly goal writing and self-evaluation… discussion on what is needed to make progress toward goal, and offering more support, more training [are key] … The principal meets with staff periodically to check in on goals and maintains walk through during school year… checking in quarterly to see if students are meeting or on target to meeting goals." Teachers know that the principal expects them to review student data, lesson plans, as well as evaluation self-assessment scores to determine area of improvement. They acknowledge that the principal's strategies are constantly used throughout the school year and lead to self-reflection and better teacher evaluations.

Theme 3: Focuses the School Culture on Supporting Teacher Collaboration and Promoting the Philosophy of Vulnerability, Honesty, and Humility to Acknowledge the Need for Continuous Learning and Growth

The principal is confident that her teachers can succeed when they work together instead of working in isolation. She has focused her efforts on establishing a culture of collaboration among all teaching staff and cultivating trust so individual teachers can have substantive conversations and discuss classroom practices and student academic performance. This includes developing cohesive groups of individuals who lead each other and support each other's teaching. The principal recognizes that promoting a philosophy of humility during substantive

conversations and encouraging teachers to be vulnerable is crucial to perpetuate a culture of trust and transform the school into a professional learning community.

Sub-theme A: Encouraging substantive conversation. The principal facilitates opportunities for teachers from different grade levels and content areas to meet regularly to discuss teaching and learning strategies that target specific areas. In addition, active participation is encouraged during staff meetings to develop a common understanding of effective practice and performance expectations where all school staff are encouraged to share their ideas, reflect on whether or not ideas attempted were successful and voice their own thoughts when making decisions, or discuss collective problem solving.

> [The common language] develops through our monthly staff meeting. These are not really just staff meetings where we sit around and talk about process. It's a staff meeting where we share ideas about teaching, and sometimes, it gets very energetic and people speak their hearts and minds. It took a long time to build a culture though where people thought it is okay to be vulnerable, and so that common language comes from professional development and how we talk to each other… and everybody gets to talk. Not just teachers [talk] but the para- pros talk. Everybody's responsible for what our kids turn out to be like. So, everybody has a voice.

The principal also encourages substantive conversations among teachers from other schools in the district. She organizes district-wide grade level meetings where teachers come together to brainstorm ideas for teaching strategies that will improve student achievement. However, the principal acknowledges that this takes time and great effort to get teachers to open up and become comfortable enough to share teaching practices and take risks by discussing new ideas.

> I have conversations with the teachers, and they have conversations with each other in grade level teams once a week… Then, we have district grade level meetings where all of the teachers at a grade level come together and have a conversation. Those have not matured yet. It takes time to build that culture of it's okay to be wrong. It's okay to make mistakes. It's okay to not be the best. But teachers don't understand… [or] feel it as threatening ... And usually people are doing the best they can. They just don't know a different way to do it. So, those conversations are probably the pivotal part that moves things in our building.

The principal shared a situation when she facilitated discussions with teachers to decide how to change some teaching practices and develop strategies for the next year in order to address the low achievement level of certain students. Teachers from different grade levels came together where everyone talked and brought different ideas. The principal acknowledged the difficultly of building professional conversations to accomplish shared goals that focus on student learning. In this case, it was essential that individual teachers speak clearly and actively listen to various teaching philosophies and thoughts from different grade levels.

> We have had at least three meetings this year where we have talked about how people teach, and what are some good strategies for teaching. Then we talked about how we're going to change things for next year to make it better for our kids. We realize that some of our students are not successful and so we have come up with a new way of dividing the work. So it worked out well. [The conversations] were just difficult because of all the divergent ideas, but we had to come up with one idea… and that took a lot of time. And, it always does… It's hard because there's different ways of teaching the children who are in kindergarten through second grade and are learning to read, or third through fifth grade

> who are… reading to learn. So, their teachers think differently. To have them come together to have a substantive conversation where they are speaking the common language is difficult, mostly because their experiences are very different…they have different points of view on how things should be done and have a bias. [Therefore,] we have a conversation and they have to be able to speak clearly and to listen well.

By promoting a professional learning community where opportunities are provided for teachers to work collaboratively, the principal prepares them to open their doors for peer observations and feedback. She puts great effort into building trusting relationships, so teachers are willing to observe each other's practices and learn from one another in a safe and inclusive learning environment.

> It doesn't take much to encourage [teachers to participate in peer observation or collaborative learning]. I think they all support each other. It's a good culture here. It took a long time to build that culture… seven years... When I first came there, it wasn't a very cohesive group. They all liked to shut their doors and nobody could come in. They were afraid of each other. They were afraid of being wrong or afraid of somebody watching… And, it took a long time to build the trust so they would open their doors.

These substantive conversation strategies shared by the principal are also endorsed by teachers. They support how she has involved them collaboratively to discuss student academic achievement and their instructional practices. They appreciate sharing a common planning time where they meet with peers regularly as grade level teams, "PLC time is intact in the schedule and safe-guarded for teachers to meet and discuss data weekly… even when the school district has not allowed the time."

Sub-theme B: Facilitating peer observation. Peer coaching was resisted by the school staff because they felt intimidated about being evaluated. However, the principal worked diligently to enact the system that will help to move away from isolation toward a collaborative and collegial culture. She slowly started peer observations with a small group of interested teachers, and then over the years, she expanded it with a greater number of teachers. She put two teachers together in the first year, four teachers in the following year, and then six more until all teachers were included. In addition, peer observation is offered as much as possible to interested teachers, and the principal covers the classroom for teachers who are out observing. Over time, she has increased expectations for peer observations.

> We have tried for six years to get this [peer observations] started. And there was resistance from the staff because they felt intimidated and that their peers would be evaluative. The first time I tried it, they took it to the union, and the union lady and I met and I told her she was crazy. I told her it wasn't fair the way she was leading because she was stifling people from growing. She wouldn't hear of it. So I slowly started after that. I got two teachers together who wanted to watch each other. Then the next year, I had four more, and then I had six, and this year I have all of them. It's a very useful way of learning. It's informal. However, I cover the class for the teacher who is out watching and I love teaching. So I offer as often as possible to anyone who will take it. But, it's compulsory for one time this year. Next year, it's compulsory for two. It's not like you will be disciplined if you don't participate, but it's socially unacceptable.

Promoting a growth mindset through peer observation. The principal's primary focus of peer observation and collaboration is to promote purposeful professional learning and a growth mindset. In order to accomplish this, she frequently encourages teachers who are struggling with

classroom practices to observe their peers who have more skills. Rather than teaching teachers the skills in a more direct way, she encourages teacher collaboration and ongoing conversations on teaching and its effective practices.

> If [teachers are] struggling and need more support, usually I have them go watch somebody who has more skills than they do. They're usually open to it as well. I can teach it to them, but that's not as good as seeing somebody else do it. Also, they have more time to have an ongoing conversation with the teacher that they go to see… Since we started [conversations] are much more open. It's much less formal. The funny thing is that after dismissal, they're talking about teaching stuff. They're not talking about social things; they're talking about teaching. So it's good.

In one instance, the principal encouraged a new, younger teacher who was struggling with certain areas and needed more support to observe an older teacher who had more skills and was excited to share with others what she does. The struggling teacher found this extremely helpful and realized that this method of learning is safe and not scary. As the struggling teacher had more success, she was more willing to open her doors and was proud to give others an opportunity to see her accomplishments.

> I encouraged [a new teacher who has three years of experience and was really struggling] to go see a teacher who just this year had an epiphany where she had learned something that worked really well for her, and she was excited and wanted to show anybody who would want to come and watch her... within days, her room was changed. It used to be very cluttered and a huge mess. Also, she had very poor classroom management. But now, she has learned from this teacher classroom management instructional strategies,

> she has watched her teach and she has used this as a model and then put her own spin on it. Having her go watch the other teacher was the key to her success.

Another change that teachers made in their teaching practices as a result of the peer observations was asking higher order questions that develop students' critical thinking skills. This aligns with the principal's focus on essential teaching skills that engage all learners.

> I think a lot of the changes I've seen are in teaching strategies. So some of my teachers are very good at asking questions and holding class discussions where other teachers are just not as strong. That's a higher skill in teaching, to be able to ask good questions and have children think, and hold them to [thinking] instead of skipping them if they don't know the answer during a good class discussion. So, the discussions have improved, they're not amazing yet, but they are improving.

The powerful influence of peer observation is not only limited to individual teaching practices but also to the school culture as a whole. Peer observation has built a stronger sense of collaboration among individual teachers, and reduced the barriers among upper and lower grade teachers. As a result, teachers have become more flexible in accepting each other's mistakes.

> So [in the case where] the younger teacher went to see the older teacher, they are from two different worlds. One is upper elementary; one is lower elementary. But when they come together, there's even more collaboration even in the lunchroom when they're talking. They used to sit by themselves. Now, they're all mixed together, and they're talking to each other and doing things outside of work. It's very helpful. The culture's gotten a lot lighter. It used to be toxic. I used to have three different circles. I had lower and upper and then the grumpy people. Now, I have less grumpy people and fewer

> barriers… they're more accepting of each other and each other's mistakes. So when things happen, they're more flexible.

Classroom observations have led to reflections and conversations that have created a school culture for collaborative learning based on a growth mindset that she has been cultivating. "I would say [peer observation] has enhanced our professional development when we come together monthly… Because [teachers] have been in each other's classrooms, they are more open to share the stuff that's not good, and to share the things that are good but not feel like they're bragging."

Reducing negative conversations. To elevate a positive school culture that stimulates collaborative efforts among teachers, the principal focuses on reducing pockets of negativity. In this regard, she emphasizes the importance of the teaching staff working directly to address issues rather than spreading negativity like wildfire in the school environment by gossiping. By addressing negative attitudes, the principal feels this will increase healthy conversations where everyone can work together and share the school's values toward building a stronger sense of community. In reflecting on how negativity could detract from developing a culture that promotes staff collaboration, the principal shared:

> If I don't address it [a pocket of negative personalities] or their peers don't address that negativity. It can grow out of control, and it can take over your entire culture… So, there was a situation yesterday where two teachers from the same team were talking to a paraprofessional, and the paraprofessional had a divergent opinion she was telling. She told one of the teachers they were wrong and then went and complained to another teacher. Well, the other teacher said that's not the way that we handle things here. You need to go talk to that person and take care of this rather than coming to me. I didn't have

to do anything. She went and talked to the person, and it got fixed. Having that culture where it's okay to just say I know you're having a bad day, but I'm not the person you should be talking to and you need to fix your problem with that person not me is what is happening. I don't do any of it. They do it all themselves…

Developing open communication. To further the development of a sense of community, the principal has invested time and energy in building trust and respectful relationships with each individual she leads. This includes supporting open communications and keeping everyone informed to address any issue or concern.

I have about 300 kids, and I know all the kids, all their cousins, aunts, uncles, moms, and dads. And I think modeling building good relationships is something that they follow. This year especially, we have some troubles with kids. And I always encourage them to write it down and send it out. So we are all aware of what's happening. So as a school community, we can help the kids. And that has helped a lot.

Supporting peer observation as a safe model of learning. The principal supports teacher observation as a safe way of professional learning, which reduces or eliminates scary thoughts that others will judge their practices. In order to accomplish that, this principal has sought to provide a safe environment and has encouraged using peer observations as an informal way of learning. "I do not use it [include teacher's feedback in the formal evaluation system]. It is private between them. Teacher to teacher... I don't have any idea of any of their conversations or any of their feedback to each other… Most of the time, they come in and tell me anyway. But, the answer is I don't know, but I do know."

The principal constantly encourages teachers to share their positive experiences through peer observations and helps teachers realize that collaborative learning is not just limited to a

certain group of teachers; thus, the school culture has become all-inclusive. In this way, the principal increases teachers' openness toward this model of collaborative learning.

She knows the strengths and weaknesses of each teacher and is able to provide appropriate suggestions on who should observe who. However, she recognizes that observing others based on individual needs can build meaningful peer partnerships, which sets a high expectation for honesty and reflection in identifying the areas where they need to learn from each other.

> When [teachers are] honest, and they go see what they need to see, and you can tell there is a difference. When they're dishonest… or maybe not thinking as deeply about their flaws, they just look for something easy, and they don't see much... You can tell when they talk to each other after these experiences. Observing can build more motivation to continue with the belief that "peer coaching is ok;" it's not scary, it's safe.

Knowing that peer observation often leads to peer coaching, the principal purposefully puts the reluctant teachers in a position to try peer coaching first, so they can promote their positive experiences with others.

> The other thing I did. We provided professional development where we had teachers from other buildings come to our building. The people I chose to be on that team were my most reluctant teachers. I purposefully put them in an uncomfortable position, so they would be the first people to try it. After they tried it, they were like billboards or advertisements for peer coaching because it wasn't scary, and it wasn't at all like what they thought it was going to be. They did not know when I signed them up for it what was going happen. I knew.

The elements shared by the principal related to peer observation are strongly supported by the teachers. They value the "chance to watch others teach and have time to collaborate" … "while [the principal] covers their classroom." In addition, they acknowledge time to "meet vertically to go over curriculum… discuss during staff meetings… [and] have book studies." In other words, the teachers realize the importance of the principal's actions in creating and maintaining an environment that values continuous, collaborative conversation and learning.

Sub-theme C: Modeling the philosophy of humility and vulnerability that inspires a learning community. The principal realizes the value of humility in leadership that is built through her powerful capacity for listening and learning. She recognizes her own flaws and weaknesses, challenges herself to admit failures, struggles, or mistakes, and thus teachers can feel comfortable enough to admit areas where they need to grow. The principal does not feel that openly admitting vulnerability or mistakes will diminish her authority in the eyes of teachers; instead, it will stimulate greater ownership and responsibility for nurturing a professional learning community where there is space for making mistakes as well as learning from and with each other. Hence, she encourages reciprocity in critical feedback and is always open and available to be asked questions that can help her become a better leader in the years to come.

> When I make a mistake, I'm very honest. When I'm learning or when I'm struggling with something, I try to ask for help… I think that probably the big thing is being vulnerable. It took me… about four years to learn to be vulnerable. I didn't like the feeling of being vulnerable. I didn't like the feeling of people knowing I didn't have it all together. I thought I was supposed to have it all together. I was embarrassed when things would fall apart. I'm not as embarrassed anymore… Yes, it's okay for you to tell me when I've made the mistake or when I could have done something better or if there's something that is not

> working well. Please come tell me so I can do it better. I think modeling that that philosophy is really being humble and taking that kind of criticism is probably the biggest thing - humility and vulnerability.

By modeling a philosophy of humility and vulnerability, the principal frees herself from being arrogant. “I would say what detracts from that was arrogance and trying to prove that I know everything and I do not.” She models using honest conversations with data where there is space for learning from others. For instance, while examining several months of student achievement data, the principal noticed that there was no growth and the percentage of students below satisfactory was still the same. Although she was not happy with the low student performance, she let the teachers explain the situation. The principal expressed the value of receiving some explanations from teachers, as they were more familiar with what happened in the classroom.

> I use data. I have to have the information but sometimes the data is wrong. Like the way I've interpreted it is wrong, and I have to change my thinking… After I listened to the teachers explain to me what's really happening, [I realized that] I don't see everything. Last year, we had a class of students, and out of 54 kids, 11 of them were either special education or English Language Learners. Eleven out of 54 is a lot. So, when you see low scores, you kind of wonder what's happening there. But then when you see their growth from day to day instead of year to year, you can see there's a lot of growth… But I was only looking at the end points. So the teacher helped me understand that I was wrong. Everybody is better off. Yeah.

By cultivating humble leadership, the principal aims to establish an open learning environment where teachers are inspired to collectively guide each other toward improving

education for all students through professional growth. As teachers acknowledged in the Teacher Questionnaire, the principal admits that she does not know all the answers, and is inclusive when it comes to finding solutions to concerns in regard to student academic needs or behavior problems.

Theme 4: Recognizes the Importance of Sharing Leadership with Teachers and Supporting their Professional Autonomy, which Empowers Them to Grow as Leaders

The principal promotes shared leadership. She strategically builds the leadership capacity to improve her school community, and recognizes areas of strength in teachers while actively providing them with professional leadership development opportunities.

> I tend to inspire. I find leaders and try to grow them as leaders but then they just go off and get a job someplace else. But, that's OK because that's what I want them to do… I find opportunities for them to take that are free or I use my building budget…. So, this year, I have found two conferences to send two of my teachers to… I'm going to use a fourth grade and a second grade teacher… and develop them to be reading coaches of the people in my building.

Teachers are often very reluctant to consider themselves as leaders. However, the principal encourages them to take new challenges in leading learning and development activities. This often changes their outlook and they become fine leaders. An example that was discussed in Theme 1 is when the principal chose some teachers to lead the PD series. In the beginning, they were uncomfortable, but by challenging these experienced teachers, they learned to be effective mentors.

Sub-theme A: Recognizing the importance of sharing the workload. Through a philosophy of shared leadership, the principal has come to realize that she does not have to do all the work alone and thus, has shared the leadership responsibilities among all members of the

school community. Her philosophy has strengthened her belief that success for all students cannot be achieved without the substantial participation of others. Within that vision of shared leadership, the principal has substantially changed her role as an instructional leader. When asked how her role as school principal has changed in the last 10 years or what is most important about being a leader, she responded:

> I would say shared leadership. I've grown myself as a learner to recognize that I don't have to do all the work. I used to think that it was my responsibility, so I had to do it. I realize it's my responsibility, but they can do it too; like they can take part of it as a team in the small systems. If everybody takes a little bit, it doesn't feel like that much work. So that's how it's [my role as school principal] changed a lot.

Initially, the principal established a leadership team of six teachers who led the school improvement plan and staff meetings. The principal views herself as a facilitator more than a direct instructor, where her role is to orchestrate rather than lead. The principal ensures that the leadership team equally represents lower and upper grades as well as each of the major subject areas, including math and ELA. This has encouraged teachers to be included throughout the decision-making process and take an active role in leading the discussion on how to enhance the academic behavior of the students and build a school community.

> At the end of every year we make a plan for what our goals are - academic, behavior, building community - and those are written in our school improvement plan. I don't do a lot of that work on my own. I have a team of six people who work on that. There are representatives from the lower elementary and upper elementary, so two of each, and then two extra people, and each are equally representing math and Language Arts and upper and lower grades. So, it's a good balance of a cross-section of each of the major

areas. We try to help students maintain good behavior so they can be learning instead of out of the classroom for discipline. So those expectations are very clear in K-5… Those six people on my leadership team usually lead these discussions and… also lead the professional development meetings each month. They create the materials, they deliver the materials, and they deliver the professional development to the teachers. I feel my job is more facilitator than the direct instructor... It's better to share that leadership.

After establishing the initial six-teacher team, more teachers volunteered to join the team to meet their desire to be leaders. The principal gave teachers the professional autonomy to expand the leadership team. She believes that this will empower teachers toward shared goals, be more aware of their responsibilities, and appreciate the key roles that each one contributes to the team. They collectively analyze specific student data from formative and summative assessments, achievement and demographics data, and teaching practices data from peer observations. To further enhance leadership capacity, the principal has empowered teachers to be lead-based on the subject areas where they consider themselves to be experts. Through shared leadership, the principal has created a balance of power and partnership that empowers all members of the team to inspire small systems, and the small systems end up creating one larger system that can more powerfully meet school goals.

The School Improvement Team is… 14 teachers They have the majority… They volunteered and nobody wants to come off the team… It's more than half of my teachers who want to be leaders... This has never happened before which is pretty amazing. They know the language… they share the labor, and so far, I think it's going to work out really well... They look at the data… at student achievement… at observational data. So when we go for peer observations, they are also collecting information from each other... We

> analyze teaching practice and then we also look at the demographics of the children we have. Are they rich? Are they poor? Are they from one place or the other? We want to see any commonalities we can and try to help our kids succeed more by being more familiar with that information…I just have to orchestrate and facilitate. [This is the] same thing with my behavior data... I have a special education teacher and special teachers who teach character education. I now have two behavior interventionists, so that's another group of six people who are not on the School Improvement Team, but they focus only on the behavior of children and discipline at school... All of these small systems make one giant system and then it works very well.

Sub-theme A: Building trust that encourages teachers to assume leadership roles. In building upon professional autonomy, the principal trusts teachers to lead the school independently, and as often as possible, to monitor the process of school development. She recognizes trust as a core element for successful school improvement efforts, which inspires her teachers to collaborate and support each other to make decisions that will enhance the teaching and learning process. Within this context, the principal models using professional and honest conversations to discuss positive points rather than starting from a negative point of view.

> It means that I can run two buildings and not worry about stuff falling apart here. I think my teachers have teacher autonomy because I'm not able to be in the building as often as I would like. Next year that will change. I have a new superintendent, and I've talked to him about making sure that part of that second building is in this building next year, [therefore,] I won't have to be pulled in so many directions. I know that my teachers have teacher autonomy because I trust them and they trust me. And, if they do need help, I give them help but in a non-punitive way... I trust that they're going to make good

> choices. I start out from the positive rather than start out from thinking from a negative point of view. Sometimes, I get burned, but it's so few times it's not a big deal.

Building a trusting relationship with teachers has empowered them to build a strong culture of parent-school engagement. Through professional autonomy, teachers became motivated to network with families in the community and have the confidence to articulate and explain the instructional practices that they use in the classroom to help students progress toward meeting the school goals and expectations.

> I think that when the teachers have autonomy, they feel free to speak intelligently to families in our community. One of my teachers was teacher of the year for our community this year, and she was able to articulate how she does things in her classroom to benefit the students. I also think that with my school improvement team… they are choosing which direction we go and also are evaluating and monitoring. And, it's so far working out OK. I think we can always do better... Each one of those people goes out into the community and explains the things that we're doing, what our goals are and what our focus is. This causes a positive snowball effect on teachers and the community.

Through her philosophy of shared leadership, the principal has empowered teachers to gain new confidence for taking leadership roles in the school. This has increased their self-efficacy and professional autonomy through collaborative work. The teachers are motivated to seek leadership positions and consider a leadership path that contributes to school community.

> I think teachers feel empowered now. Especially since I have learned that I don't have to do all the work. They feel a sense of being able. I think they have confidence that they can be teacher-leaders. I don't think they had that confidence in the past. I also think that as they grow in their practice, they become a lot more confident in themselves.

Teachers acknowledged the positive effects that the principal has on their willingness to implement leadership tendencies by embracing grade level and staff meetings where they discuss school issues and work together to find solutions, like implementing the Feeling Buddies curriculum and Conscious Discipline. Several teachers even shared that they felt comfortable in sharing materials with and modeling lessons for their peers and facilitating monthly book studies in order to improve teaching and learning for students. By sharing authority and decision-making, the principal has built the capacity of her teachers and prepared everyone for taking the lead. This has propelled teachers toward personal growth and has increased school improvement.

Principal Two - Case Description

Principal Two leads an elementary school in an urban district in Southwest Michigan that serves a racially and linguistically diverse student population. There are about 400 students, of which 44% are White (European and Middle Eastern descent), 31% are African American, 9% are Hispanic, and 6% are Asian. Almost one-third of the students receive bilingual support, and of these most are from the Middle East, primarily from Saudi Arabia and Syria. 82% percent of the students received free and reduced lunch in 2017-2018. There were 29 classroom teachers, teachers for art, music, physical education, as well as specialists teaching in the resource room and English as a second language (ESL) program. Ten teachers hold Bachelor's degrees, 17 hold Master's degrees, and two hold Specialist degrees. They average 16 years of teaching experience.

Principal Two graduated from high school as the valedictorian of the class and had a passion for math. When he went to the University of Wisconsin, Madison, he ended up taking a lot of classes in theater and switched his major to theater. He then transferred to UCLA and graduated with a Degree in Theater Arts. He worked in theater and television production for

about ten years, while working as a paralegal and licensing music rights. During this time, he gained teaching experience in various areas, such as teaching drama to younger students, T'ai Chi Chuan to older adults, and reading for adults who had difficulties. While volunteering in school programs, he decided to become a teacher instated of being a lawyer.

He began his teaching career in a South Central Los Angeles elementary school with ESL students, and taught for four and a half years. In 1996, he decided to move to Southwest Michigan because he was offered a job to teach at an elementary school. He taught kindergarten through fourth grade for 14 years in that district. While teaching, he completed his Master's in Educational Leadership. After earning his Master degree, he worked as a literacy coach for two years, an assistant principal for three years, and is now in his ninth year as principal.

Presentation of Themes and Sub-Themes

Four major themes emerged as essential activities and behaviors that Principal Two has used to build a collaborative school culture that empowers teachers to be more professional and autonomous through continuous learning and growth. The major themes show that this principal

1. Promotes success for all students by encouraging differentiated instruction in all classrooms
2. Uses continuous conversation and observations so that teachers have a regular process of reflection and improvement
3. Engages teachers in a teamwork environment that fosters a solid network for collaborative learning and development
4. Cultivates leadership in teachers to increase confidence in their abilities and responsibilities

These themes are supported with sub-themes and elements that were expressed by the principal, teachers at the school and, in some cases, documentation.

Theme 1: Promotes Success for All Students by Encouraging Differentiated Instruction in All Classrooms

Principal Two leads a school that serves a diverse student population from a variety of racial backgrounds and cultures along with a variety of needs. The principal ensures that his school is guided by a clear vision focused on meeting all students' learning needs, and also that educational strategies are in place to create a high-quality learning environment.

> Our ultimate goal is to teach all our students and get them up to grade level in both reading and math and all other subject areas... We have an international population with many students still learning English, students with special needs, and students coming from traumatic situations. So, our goal is to provide a safe environment for learning for all students so we can help them be successful.

The principal considers differentiated instruction as the key factor in responding to each student's aptitude and ability. He encourages teachers to utilize a variety of instructional strategies that are essential for meeting individual learning styles by incorporating research-based teaching methods in their classrooms. Accordingly, when planning lessons for diverse learners, teachers consider the students with specific difficulties, the students with special education needs, and students with advanced abilities. He shared the importance of employing new ways of thinking about teaching and learning in order to "plan for all of those things, and you have to teach teachers how to do that differentiating of instruction…Sometimes, they do it individually, but as a whole school, we work on those together…Differentiating instruction is a big thing. Before, many teachers would think, 'Oh, I was going to do the lesson from the book and teach everybody the same.' But now, they know they have to differentiate." Therefore,

creating differentiated classrooms that build better skills and knowledge of students has become the main focus of the school's vision, which aligns with the principal's daily leadership actions.

Sub-theme A: Focuses on meeting student needs. The principal understands the importance of providing all students with high-quality, explicit instruction in the core content areas and adapting that instruction to meet students' unique needs. Because some students have fallen behind their grade-level peers, the principal emphasizes that teachers be knowledgeable in appropriate intervention programs or strategies that better meet the needs of those students. He has placed a great focus on using a student growth model. By applying this model, teachers can track data of individual students and gain information to move students from their current level to a target achievement level. "By using the data, we see where our students are, and then we really focus on a growth model [to determine] how we get our students from whatever level they are to the next level, and then up to the level beyond that."

Using a growth model focuses on having each student achieve at least one year of academic growth each school year by using multiple assessments. However, if students are not achieving one year of growth or more, the principal works with the teachers more closely in determining student academic needs and identifying appropriate interventions that should be used. He understands this process takes time and a great amount of effort:

> We try to measure our students on tests to see that they've made a year's growth... But, if they're behind, we're trying to get them to catch up and make more than a year's growth. I think that's where using the data really helps us measure teacher success with teaching students and providing the interventions they need... when you're below grade level, it takes a lot of work to get you caught up.

Establishing the use of data. The principal has developed a system that prioritizes the continuous use of individual student achievement data to drive instructional improvement. With that, he expects teachers to "keep the data and the student academic [achievement] in the forefront and work to improve". He has teachers focus on purposeful analysis of their data in order to identify strategies and interventions that will increase the chances for meeting all student needs.

In order to obtain a deeper understanding of each student's learning needs, the principal encourages teachers to examine different types of data. At the beginning of the school year, teachers review demographic data to carefully track the school community and identify any problem or need. "I will go over demographic data for the school [including] the race of the students, qualification for free and reduced lunch, and student attendance data that are important at that time."

Teachers then use observational data as a formative assessment that engages them in a continuous process of assessment and evaluation of student learning. This involves the use of tools such as checklists to document and evaluate skills and knowledge of each individual student, then plan instructional activities that respond to identified needs. The principal discussed how at the primary level, teachers are using a pre-reading checklist to monitor specific performance and progress of students that can assist in planning instruction:

> When we start in kindergarten, we have a pre-reading checklist that we do with students to see if they understand what a book is, who the author is, illustrator, how you turn pages in a book, etc. … We take a really quick assessment in the Fall to see if they have the 10 points of pre-reading. Usually by October and November, the teachers re-evaluate and almost everybody has 10 points, and then they go on. Next, we're also measuring if they

> know the letters of the alphabet, and if they know the sounds of the letters… We use that as a measurement and then we get into the reading, because this is all kind of blended together and everybody's in different phases. Then, we start testing [students] on reading [to determine if] they can read a book independently… So using that kind of data helps us with managing the growth of our students.

The principal shared a clipboard teachers use as an informal assessment tool to manage student data and track the progress of each student. By using this tool, teachers can engage with their students and determine areas of strength and concern, then adjust instruction to improve learning levels.

> Most teachers have a clipboard with all of students' names, and they'll have their data from the fall. They can watch their Fountas and Pinnell scores grow and improve. A lot of them have it just hand written out, and they keep that in front of them all the time, so when they're reading with a student, they know where they're at. They know what they need to do to get them to the next level. Then, we also ask [teachers] to put [the data] into a data warehouse so we can see what [students] are doing.

Even more important than the observational data discussed above is the *Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment Systems* (BAS), which teachers continuously use in order to provide individualized instructional support based on each student's reading level. "Our teachers will be using [BAS] throughout the year because when they break up into reading groups with students, they know what reading level the students were at... These students are on level J…on level F… on level M. [Teachers] provide specific literature and specific instruction geared towards students at those levels."

Another type of formative assessment that teachers are encouraged to use three times a year to track student progress is the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) from the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA). From the principal's point of view, the format of the MAP online assessment is comparable to the M-STEP, but where M-STEP "only gave us a picture once a year… and the data is already old by the time we see the scores. And our students have moved on so we have to extrapolate away from there." The MAP is given quarterly.

> [The principal considers the MAP] fairly accurate for most kids for finding out… what levels they are in both math and reading… and science goes from third to fifth grade. So we'll take an assessment this fall to see where they're at. The nice thing about the program is, it's broken up into different levels… [It determines] where the students are, and what skills they need to learn to move up to the next level and to the next level and to the next level.

Therefore, using various types of formative assessment tools is critical to providing a clearer picture of a student learning and growth trajectory and helps determine where teachers need to focus instruction for each student. As the principal stated, "The MAP gives us one good component of [learning] and then the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment gives us the other part that we can use and update monthly."

Making time to examine data. The principal schedules regular staff meetings that focus on examining student achievement data. By working collaboratively and systematically with teachers to share student outcomes, the principal reinforces an ongoing cycle of instructional improvement to better meet the needs of all students. This includes a variety of teaching strategies:

> I start almost all our professional development meetings and staff meetings with student data. We use the data to focus the discussions with teachers on things that we need to see [accomplished]…. We look at the school-wide data when we're together as a group. Sometimes, it's grade level data, but we're always looking at something and how our students are progressing - what we need to do next. What can we improve?

The principal shared an experience where teachers examined student data to identify students who struggled with learning and then provided these students with effective instruction that would close gaps in their knowledge. The principal encourages adjusting instruction constantly and changing lessons as a vital approach to reducing learning difficulties:

> One of the things that we've been looking at with our data [is that] our students do much better with fictional stories. But, they have a harder time with informational text. So, we were looking at the data that shows that fewer of the students are able to master informational text, like social studies or science - part of it's because of the vocabulary; part of it's because of the format. So we've come up with strategies to help... focus more on informational text. We still will teach each [type of text], but we will change the way we do some of the lessons… We see the general trends and we'll focus on specific trends class-by-class or grade level-by-grade level.

Feedback from the Teacher Questionnaire provides powerful insights about how the principal makes student achievement data an integral part of ongoing instructional improvement. Teachers also reported that a systemic use of both formal and informal assessments is encouraged to ensure that students are truly learning what is being taught. One teacher stated,

> We collect data from multiple sources, including MAP, F&P, M-Step [to obtain a deeper understanding of students learning needs and increase the understanding of what changes

> need to be made]. And at grade level meetings, we are given lots of testing data [that foster making good decisions about instruction and action planning].

Moreover, the principal has teachers examine certain types of district data to compare how the school preformed in comparison to other schools in the district. Feedback from teachers underscored the importance of the data conversations at team meetings to impact professional achievement of individual teachers. As one teacher said, "Data drives instruction, so we use and talk about data and use it for personal learning goals."

Determining interventions to better meet student needs. By examining and analyzing test scores and school data, the principal and teachers continuously identify evidence-based interventions that can accelerate learning. This requires offering different professional development (PD) opportunities for teachers to develop shared language and common understandings about teaching practice:

> When we work in our school improvement team (SIT), we're setting overarching goals for the school on ways we want to improve... So, we plan some of the professional development to take place either during our building time, or I'll get substitute teachers so that we can offer the professional development to get all the teachers on the same page.

Through analyzing areas of student needs, the SIT selects one major concern to address each year:

> Based on the school data, we set goals for the school, which will include a variety of different kinds of professional development for our teachers. One year we were focusing on reading interventions. We spent a whole year doing a lot of training on reading interventions. Another year, we did SIOP [Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol], which is designed to help English Language Learners, but it helps all our students… And

> the other thing we've been doing is working on how to provide math interventions for students.

State law now requires that all third graders read at grade level before advancing to fourth grade. The principal emphasized the necessity of providing intensive interventions that will support all students to become proficient readers by the end of third grade.

> We have a third grade reading law, which makes it imperative that our students are reading at grade level by third grade. So we set a lot of training on how to do reading interventions then set time aside to do extra reading with students, so we can get them caught up [to grade level] academically. We've had a lot of training with our staff on how to do that, and we're going to the next level next year, but are trying to merge it all together into a grade level intervention block.

In order to provide a grade level intervention block, the principal redesigned schedules to allow those teachers to meet together during the school day, while preserving the 90-minute reading block and the additional 30 minutes of intervention time.

> This year… I put all the schedules together and worked around all their reading blocks. So, at least once or twice a week, all the grade level teams can meet together …either during the planning time at lunch or planning time when one person has their class in music and one person has their class in P.E. Then two teachers can meet… they can communicate with each other.

The principal emphasizes training for Eureka Math, which promotes a new language for math. The training has focused on helping teachers utilize different strategies and tools to assist students in building a deeper understanding of math. This, in turn, prepares teachers to be

problem solvers in order to ensure that students are engaged throughout math instruction using the new approach.

> [Teachers] have to have a strong understanding of mathematics and teaching with the new curriculum, and that's very difficult… With the Eureka math program, there's a lot of new language and a lot of new ways to work with numbers. For some children, this is much better than the old way, but other children still might benefit more from the other way.

As the number of English Language Learners (ELL) has increased in the school, the principal recognized the necessity of providing resources that address their academic needs. This includes promoting a shared language of Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP), which assists classroom teachers in developing the best practices for addressing the academic needs of English language learners with vocabulary development and academic content skills for "helping transition students from other languages into English." As the principal emphasized, "The big things that we've promoted here is the language of SIOP, teaching children from many different countries, teaching children about language deficits." In reflecting on the instructional strategies of SIOP, which includes different communication strategies to better address the academic needs of English language learners (ELLs), the principal shared:

> For many teachers, [SIOP is] a review of really good practices and ways that we can have all our students to be successful in the classroom, because we have so many English Language Learners. We have students from different countries having to learn some complicated vocabulary and ideas. We find different ways to communicate with them [these students] through graphics, having pictures, and vocabulary. We use some translators… so that we can communicate, and we have bilingual parapros and teachers

> who speak Arabic. So, we use a variety of different ways to communicate. With our students and make sure that they're all welcome in the classroom and are getting support.

SIOP assists teachers in staying focused on the academic and language needs of students and developing lessons that meet those needs.

> We try to have two objectives, there's a learning objective about the comprehension or sequencing of stories. But then there might be a language objective, which would go with that, and different ways that different students can show the objective that doesn't always have to be that you're just writing and copying everything on paper. …We try to find different ways that students can show they understand and comprehend even if they don't understand all the English yet.

Through promoting a shared language of SIOP, along with incorporating its strategies, individual teachers are expected to be more reflective in using in-depth practices that could actively engage ELL students in the learning process. The principal shared that when examining formative student achievement data, teachers must assess their own practices and consider new or better ways of teaching to meet the different needs of students. The core of SIOP is to build differentiated instruction that meets different student needs, and this requires special planning by teachers.

> [Sometimes teachers] find practices that maybe they're really good at teaching students who are in a middle class income or English Language Learners, but they have trouble with another kind of student. So, they have to learn how to work with the other students as well… So, that's where the SIOP training and the differentiation helps a lot of teachers to see different ways that students learn.

By recognizing the diverse groups of students, from those who do not speak English to those who are academically advanced and need extra challenges, the principal emphasizes individualized instruction as a critical way to focus on the needs of each student:

> It's actually more individualized instruction… We're working with small groups but some children need individual help, so sometimes we have been working with a tutor one–on-one, one-on-two or one-on-three, and sometimes, even one-on-four to meet the needs, but it depends on the child.

The principal therefore always expects teachers to include small groups as a crucial part of their teaching strategies. A small group activity involves specific assignments for students and uses learning activities that are geared toward special needs:

> [Teachers] have to differentiate. We kind of figure out where our students are at the beginning and then do a lesson that has everybody together to get them all going in the same direction. But, then you break them up into smaller groups and help improve them so that differentiation is a big thing -- using some of the strategies that we learn from SIOP, and talking about different strategies that have helped.

For individualized instruction, the principal shared a teaching method that teachers use when students take the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) math tests.

> We use Compass Learning, and each student has an individual folder based on their scores. They may be strong in addition and subtraction, so they'll get lessons on multiplication and division, but they may be poor in measurement and problem solving, so they get some easier folders for that. They have to work through their own folders, and everybody's folders are different on what they need to practice, so that it's individualized. Also, when the teacher is reading with children, she tries to group them together, but then

> she will assess each child individually at least once a month to see where they're at in reading.

Sub-theme B: Promoting a common language and understanding. In order for differentiated instruction to happen, the school improvement team and principal identified programs and techniques that teachers must implement. The process of individualized instruction begins with analyzing data. Once the data is discussed and a student's needs are identified, the principal emphasizes that teachers must participate in training that will promote ongoing understanding and implementation of interventions that work with students who share those special needs. The training incorporates different elements of professional development that focus first on teachers and their needs related to implementing differentiation.

> There is a building initiative that I expect everybody to attend, [which focuses on teaching strategies that are associated with a new curriculum or program]. But, there are voluntary activities that are offered after school both at the school here or at the district level [through which may teachers learn about new strategies or techniques to apply in classroom].

A variety of professional development opportunities are offered throughout the school year. Moreover, to engage teachers in professional development that supports systemic change in instruction that addresses student needs, the principal provides numerous opportunities for teacher collaboration.

> It's very difficult [to address] the different needs of all the students. So the training that we're giving hopefully helps [teachers] connect each year with a few more students. We're are not saying teachers can do it all in one year, but each year we're finding a different group of students that we're focusing on, and we're trying to improve how we

> teach to those students. I think this helps teachers build a relationship with the student as well.

Scheduling grade-level meetings. The principal has built into the school schedule planning opportunities for grade-level teams to discuss instruction and center on student needs. Initial discussion often begins during a staff meeting when the principal opens communication between teachers, so all can work together toward a common purpose or goal and connect with peers to build a more trusting relationship for discussing how to improve the quality of instruction that they offer all students. By facilitating communication among teachers, the principal encourages strong connections and opportunities to form partnerships.

> Professional development time, particularly in the beginning of the year, is when we spend a lot of time getting to know each other. There are icebreaking activities where we can find out about teachers: their favorite books, why they got into teaching, information about families and travel. We do that first to break down the barriers, so we can learn to listen to each other as well as communicate freely with the staff…it develops cohesiveness in the staff, so they can work together... I have our teachers working intensely in grade-level teams, but then we also go across grade-level groups as well… We do that during our professional development throughout the school year as well.

Grade-level teams are the foundation of communication. When discussing grade-level meetings, the principal emphasized cross-grade-level teams that provide teachers the opportunity to develop new insights, ideas, and support. He expanded grade-level meetings to cross-grade-levels so teachers could discuss particular strategies that can be applied to a variety of students at different levels.

> We do have [teachers] working as grade-level teams. There are a lot of discussions that go on at grade levels. Then, during some of my building team meetings, I combine grade levels if we're working on specific skills in math. I have a kindergarten, first, and second grade teachers saying, 'How do you teach this skill?' And they say, 'Well, this is what we do in kindergarten, this is what we're doing in first, and the second grade.' I don't see this. I only see that the kids don't need help with this. So, we share that way, so [teachers] can help each other as well and know where a child is coming from and what a child has to be ready for in the next year.

The principal supports every teacher in becoming a member of strong teams by building and maintaining trusting relationships that are necessary for continuous improvement. He realizes that "Teachers get comfortable talking to [their peers] who are on staff. They are familiar with their grade-level peers, and they work together well and plan well with those." During professional development meetings, teachers are encouraged to sit where they want and talk to whom they want to talk in groups. However, at other times, the principal constructs activities where he breaks groups into different teams, so teachers can work with and learn about other peers.

> Through some of the professional development, there are opportunities to talk, and [teachers] learn new things about other teachers like, "I didn't know you attended this college. I didn't know you traveled to this country. I didn't know you have experience working with these people." And so that builds the relationships, which builds their knowledge about the people they work with.

Planning professional development for all teachers. The principal emphasized that the first, and probably most important, area of professional development is "making sure that all

teachers are reading teachers." With that in mind, teachers are expected to work toward a common goal of supporting individual students to become proficient readers by third grade. The principal was at a school that was part of the Reading First Grant in 2000, where he received a lot of training on how to teach reading. However, many of the teachers in the school did not receive the extensive training that the principal had. Therefore, when the principal first came to the school, he realized the necessity of providing substantial and ongoing professional development activities that would allow every teacher to become a reading teacher. Through his own experience, the principal attempted to bring literacy professional development to the school and get all teachers focused on the same goals:

> I went through extensive training one time as a teacher, but then I went through the training a second time as a literacy coach. Then, I started teaching other teachers how to do the reading training... One of the first things I had to do was make sure everybody got the training to be a good reading teacher... So, all the teachers have all the current language that they need, particularly in reading.

The principal works with teachers to plan professional development support following purposeful training on the five essential components of reading instruction that are necessary to fit each student's needs. The principal also provides the time for teachers to discuss these reading strategies with their peers:

> We had to do some professional development on what it takes to be a good reading teacher, including, what kind of skills, the big five ideas of reading: phonics, comprehension, fluency, and building on those skills. So we would often have activities that would train the teachers on the skills that they needed, but then give time to talk about what it looks like, what it sounds like in the classroom, how some people have used

> it before. We wanted to make sure that teachers received all the training that they needed to improve student learning.

The principal also provides additional training on how to use the Benchmark Assessment System (BAS) to work with students on varying reading levels. The principal explained that since the school district adopted the BAS, teachers have been offered a lot of training that encourages administering and analyzing the assessment data to identify appropriate instruction.

> When we started with Fountas and Pinnell's reading program, there was a lot of learning for the teachers on how to read with students, how to diagnose any reading problems, how to know where to start with all the different levels, and how you take that data to plan for instruction.

In order to support teachers in implementing this new approach to reading and understand consistent classroom practices, the principal makes time and coaching available to discuss essential literacy skills and share ideas. He believes that encouraging peer collaboration is crucial for teachers to feel comfortable enough to carry out the strategies in their own classrooms. "We had teachers working with each other to practice to make sure that they could do it well, and… go through the motions, so they felt more comfortable doing it with the students. Then we would support them with… extra meeting time so they could evaluate the data and improve."

Throughout PD opportunities, the principal expects teachers to use the BAS Assessment to find the correct activities that will respond to a diverse group of students and assign specific assignments and learning activities that are geared toward their needs. Teachers must be able to "identify how a student is doing with their reading… know if either pre-reading or reading skills are missing…and know how to promote reading with the differentiated groups using differentiated instruction."

As previously mentioned, the principal provided resources to support individual teachers when implementing Eureka Math. The principal discussed how teachers from different grade levels were trained in using the resources and worked with math coaches through online support:

> Some of the activities that we do in math are completely different than what we've ever done before. And, we've had a lot of discussions with teachers about whether they think it's working, whether it's an improvement, whether it's not, and if questions are still out there. Our kindergarten through third grade teachers were trained in it, then our fourth and fifth grade teachers wanted to learn too, so they worked with math coaches to learn the program. They did it through online support and through meeting with their peers. They found out how things worked and did it.

In addition, the principal ensures that all teachers are receiving the professional development needed to promote the shared language of the SIOP Model, "so they have the best practices for teaching all students with vocabulary development and helping transition students from other languages into English." Therefore, through a variety of PD opportunities, all teachers have been able to become better reading teachers, implement the new math program and build vocabulary for second language learners.

Extending PD activities. Along with the basic professional development that has been offered for all teachers, the principal provides additional support when teachers need to get further training in a new curriculum or develop certain teaching skills.

> Sometimes I support [teachers] attending additional professional development opportunities that support [district initiatives]. If I find that they're missing something, I will send teachers to professional development at the Kalamazoo Regional Education Service Association (KRESA), or to other things that are happening either in the state or

> nearby. I've sent teachers to specific writing workshops, classroom management, or have district or KRESA coaches come in and help support teachers… in either reading, math, or classroom management.

Teachers receive ongoing, embedded coaching support that is in line with their instructional needs. The principal ensures that time and space are created to facilitate coaching framework practices that influence instructional practices in positive ways. He shared a time when a teacher received additional support from the reading coaching system to improve the use of small-group learning activities to achieve more in-depth practices.

> I have one teacher working with a literacy coach… and she changed her routines. She used to have all the kids bundled together…Instead they're assigned specific work to do first, and once they finish the work, they go to specific learning activities that are geared towards them. She changed her practices from trying to do one size for all the kids to more individualized instruction. There's a lot more differentiation going on in our classrooms for the students who come in… And that's what we need… because everybody is not the same.

In order to assist teachers in feeling comfortable working with an instructional coach, the principal provides teachers with opportunities to get informal, constructive feedback on their teaching practices and express where they need help. He makes it safe and comfortable for teachers to receive this type of informal feedback, because he does not use it formal evaluations:

> They [math and literacy coaches] may videotape a teacher teaching a lesson and review it with them, but it's done as part of an improvement process, not an evaluation process… If I have a coach go in, [teachers] can work peer-to-peer. So I set up those opportunities with reading and math coaches to help them become better teachers.

Within the additional training, the principal gives teachers the choice to attend outside professional development activities and tries to support them in any way necessary:

> We’ve had additional professional development activities on using our data system called Illuminate, our data management system. There have been additional volunteer activities about the mathematics program and the writing program that teachers have attended. Teachers have choices to attend outside professional development activities and get [release] time to attend them. Sometimes our building professional development is set up so that people can make choices. Some people will want to work on technology, some want to work on reading interventions, and some want to work on administering certain tests, so those possibilities are there. We can also bring in coaches as well. Sometimes teachers request to have a math coach or a reading coach help them learn a specific skill. I will arrange to make sure they have a substitute at least for part of the day, so sometimes they'll teach with the coach for part of the day, and then they take the other part of the day to meet with the coach…to discuss what went well and what things they need to improve upon.

The principal has recognized the value of utilizing his own knowledge and participating actively in teacher development. He emphasizes the importance of modeling his role as a technology leader to help train his staff on the integration of technology in student learning.

> I've done some meetings with teachers where I've been helping them get some of the technology professional development that they need to incorporate technology into their teaching or to utilize the hardware that we have in the building already. I've been trained a lot in technology, so I have helped train the staff by modeling it when running different workshops.

In some cases, the principal works with teachers to help improve their different practices. This usually happens during building professional development time. He explained, “We have time built into the year where sometimes…I may have to teach or I may have to help support a group of teachers with a certain assessment.” The principal wants to individualize professional development when necessary to help all teachers reach the school’s goals for differentiated instruction and to implement new curricula.

Specialized training. The principal is aware of the challenges that beginning teachers face, and thus he understands the necessity to provide additional support and meaningful professional development that better prepares them to actively work toward meeting diverse student needs.

> Some of the newer teachers need a lot more support with Fountas [BAS] because we use that as our main day-to-day reading tool. I make sure they get the training, and that's when I call the literacy coaches to come in and help train them... Then, other newer teachers need a little more help with classroom management or ideas on how to differentiate instruction. They may not have had all the SIOP training that other teachers have, so we will do a SIOP review, but then I'll bring more resources for those beginning teachers.

Moreover, when teachers are struggling to support a group of students, the principal provides specific professional development that addresses each teacher’s individual needs.

> Sometimes I will send teachers to other buildings to observe, or I'll borrow some of their teachers to provide professional development for our school. We've had a writing coach from another school come and teach our teachers about writing. When our teachers were getting very frustrated on certain aspects of a program, we use quality personnel… I often

> have an extra substitute and have that person come in and work with teachers one-on-one or just go around the building and help teachers. I'm trying to provide needed professional development for them.

Some teachers have poor classroom management skills and thus the principal started holding professional conversations with the teachers about their student achievement data to better understand what was not working in their classrooms before determining the necessary support.

> I had some conversations with teachers… They have the basic skills with teaching and classroom management… What I would often do would be coming in with the data and saying, "It's showing here your students are not progressing the way they should progress. How can you help these students? Why is this data so poor?" and I let the teacher start the discussion about what they could do to improve, and I would share some ideas... Then, that's when I might present training. I might bring a coach in and have them observe in this classroom. Or, I use other staff members to help… We have a lot of conversations about things that are just not working and what the teacher needs to do… A lot of times, providing that extra support helps a teacher improve their reflection on teaching and learning.

The principal asserted that the majority of conversations that he holds with struggling teachers focus on classroom management and specific teaching skills. Through these conversations, he provides extra support to address a teacher's difficulties. This assistance can include a variety of resources, ideas, and strategies for improvement.

> For classroom management, sometimes teachers need some extra support or some extra ideas on how to deal with students who don't follow rules by utilizing different ways to

> turn around behavior… Sometimes we'll do it in a child assistance team meeting. Other times, it's about specific teaching skills. Some teachers may have difficulties with a whole group situation. Sometimes, they may have difficulties planning for small groups. So, depending on the situation, I will come up with ideas… and I'll point out some things that I want teachers to read and do. There're videos and a lot of resources that we have from coaches on down, and I'll set up a plan with the teacher to improve their teaching either with the whole group or small groups.

The importance of offering a variety of learning opportunities to teachers was not only verbalized by the principal, but also by the teachers themselves. Through the Teacher Questionnaire, teachers acknowledged the importance of providing the necessary professional development for all teachers, such as SIOP training. They noted that he also encourages teachers to sign up for professional development opportunities to continue learning and building their instructional practices. One teacher shared, "He knows a lot about each staff member, and he can direct us to certain staff members when we need help with something… [He] gives us a lot of good websites, articles and books that we can learn from." By encouraging teachers to try new things and build their knowledge base, the principal ensures that teachers can better respond to the needs of students. Teachers also value the regular grade level team meetings that the principal has established to provide opportunities for dialogue that enrich teaching practices within a professional learning community. The teachers shared that "grade level and cross-grade level teams are encouraged [along with] regular meetings. This gives constant food for thought. [The principal] updates us on what's in the news by using guest speakers, and during meetings, he provides PD activities."

Theme 2: **Uses Continuous Conversation and Observations so that Teachers have a Regular Process of Reflection and Improvement**

The principal has established an engaged and supportive professional community for teachers and students in which learning flourishes. Determining strategies that focus on student learning is an explicit priority of his instructional vision; supporting teacher growth and improvement are essential parts of the school's efforts. He recognizes the value of holding open conversations with teachers that built on a foundation of trust to foster continuous learning and growth by providing ongoing collaborative support. "We have a lot more conversations now. I go with the idea that it's more for continuous improvement. And I think the teachers have learned that they can trust me with some of those ideas now." Supporting these professional norms and trusting that teachers will eventually begin to embrace a school culture of continuous improvement has moved the principal from transitional to transformational leadership.

> I try to work as a transformational leadership (sic) in working with teams of teachers. I did a lot with modeling with the teachers, working with them and trying to see where our teachers were at. I did a lot of observations the first year and tried to do everything, to experience everything. And once I could figure out where people were at then I could start forming teams and deciding how to change the culture at the school. At times you have to be a transactional leader and tell people what needs to be done immediately. But, I do a lot with discussions… mostly I found if I talked to teachers, told them what I saw, what I thought they could be doing better, they would make the changes that needed to be done, and that seemed to work very well. And so I started putting the trust in the teachers. And they would admit, you know, that they weren't comfortable doing this, and they needed some practice. And, so I would give them the help they would need.

In conjunction with the focus on building a culture of continuous improvement, the

principal works to integrate meaningful, targeted professional learning into the teacher evaluation system. In adopting Charlotte Danielson's *Framework for Teaching* (FFT) for evaluating teacher effectiveness, his overarching goal was to ensure a continuous process of improvement in teaching practices that would strongly influence learning experiences for students. However, continuous improvement has become increasingly challenging with ever-changing state requirements. The principal asserted that with the state prioritizing students' test scores every year and using them as the main measure of teacher effectiveness, teachers experience high stress levels because they believe they are not providing what is best for their students.

> There are a lot of laws that dictate how we have to do teacher evaluations, which are not good for education, not good for teaching children… According to state law, 25 per cent of the teacher evaluation is done on student test results. There's such a strong emphasis on testing... Teachers don't feel like they're teaching… Next year, that 25 per cent of the evaluation goes up to 40 per cent, so this becomes very important to a teacher. But, it's not why they went into teaching. They went into teaching to help kids, not to test them all the time.

To overcome the challenges associated with teaching to tests, the principal has been trying to find a balance with the evaluation system that motivates teachers to balance their teaching with test preparation or state laws. During continuous conversations with teachers, he provides teachers with opportunities to discuss students who are most at risk. In this way, he cultivates supportive working conditions that help teachers feel comfortable dealing with the pressures of high-stress testing, while making them realize that they are providing high-quality teaching.

> We’re trying to balance what is right with education: what we know from working with kids daily, with what the law says. So, it's a fine balance of trying to meet the law, but also to do what we know is going to help our kids the most and have quality teachers in all our classrooms…So I am trying to balance that with the teacher saying, “Forget it, don't worry about this test, let's do the teaching instead”… And they're trying to find that balance. I'm trying to find that balance with them and help them so they can be better teachers, and so their scores reflect that.

In trying to maintain a balance between state requirement and education, this principal holds a strong philosophy where teachers are encouraged to focus on enriching their teaching practices on a day-to-day basis, because “testing is not as important as spending the time doing the lessons and working with students and making sure they're improving… We try to make sure that the emphasis is on quality teaching.”

Thus, with diverse groups of students, especially ELLs, the principal understands that it takes time and great effort for student growth to be reflected through testing. Understanding the current political situation helps teachers feel comfortable about student progress in academic areas and the types of instructional support that they provided.

> Also, when we have English Language Learners, it's going to take three to five years for them to get the academic language. Even though they're making great gains, it's not going to show up on a test. When we have to take a state test like the MSTEP, we know they will not do well yet, but each year, we can track them. “Look, this year they did this. Now they're here. They're still below where they need to be. But, next year we'll get them to here and then the year after, we'll get them to grade level.” So, sometimes we have to look at it that way.

Although all of these factors represent an essential challenge to the teaching profession, the principal works for teachers by providing ongoing support so each teacher can grow professionally. He encourages teachers to integrate a wider variety of student assessments in the formative evaluation and assessment framework to reflect better on their own performance. As discussed in the previous theme, teachers are encouraged to use a student growth model that provides richer information to track student learning. Recognizing that the school is an urban school district located in a small city where many students are coming unprepared for school, the principal emphasizes the importance of including student growth in the evaluation system so that teachers can present the best model for what they do in measuring the growth of their students. "We're doing a lot more on growth models, and I'm teaching teachers about how to measure growth with students so that we can get them caught up." Therefore, with the growth model, the principal asserts the idea of "trying to spread out the testing scores, so we're using the score not just for an end result but to measure growth as well. I think that makes a really big difference."

Teacher feedback also shows that the principal wants teachers to continuously grow and develop their instructional skills. A teacher stated that the principal "answers questions and gives examples to explain evaluations and how to accomplish higher ratings…. [He] is positive with staff members and supportive in many key areas. He goes above and beyond to support the professional growth of staff." Although there are challenges associated with some aspects of the evaluation system, the principal understands that providing ongoing support is necessary to help teachers improve as professionals.

He mentioned that the teacher evaluation process usually begins with sitting down with each teacher, setting goals for the year, integrating meaningful and targeted professional learning by doing walk-throughs, discussing what he observes, then completing a formal observation that

is followed by a discussion on the positives and things that need to improve. The principal feels that the ongoing visits and discussions are the most valuable tool.

Sub-theme A: Building open, informal conversations.

Walk-throughs. To assist teachers in their practices, the principal visits classrooms regularly, using walk-throughs to gather evidence that will provoke discussion about instruction with teachers. Through being a highly visible leader in the school-learning environment, this principal provides teachers with ongoing support. This support includes providing specific and focused feedback following the walk-throughs as a tool to focus on what changes that teacher made or should make to better meet diverse needs of students. In describing these unannounced, informal observations that provide a glimpse of the teacher's daily practice, the principle stated:

> Each year I work with all the teachers - we develop a goal for the year or goals. We do follow ups throughout the year. I do data review with teachers throughout the year, then we do a summary at the end of the year. But additionally, the teachers know that they are going to see me in the school and in the classroom almost every day... I'll be walking through. They say they don't hear me, and they are working at the board and turn around and I'm just standing there, and they're very surprised sometimes, but so they don't know when to expect me; it could be in the morning, in the afternoon, at lunch. And if there's problems or if there's something I think a teacher needs to change, I will talk with them and say, "I saw this. How could you do that better?" And I see if they understand what the problem was. It may have been a mistake, and then they fix it so that it doesn't happen again.

Through using these informal, observation walk-throughs, which teachers know can be held at any time, the principal believes that they "keep [teachers] alert and trying to do their best."

Feedback conversations. Along with these informal observations, the principal is looking to make time to talk with teachers during the school day to provide positive, ongoing feedback on their efforts or discuss some classroom issues that come up.

> I do a lot of conversations with teachers. I catch them at lunchtime or at the end of the day or beginning of the day. "I saw this. You did a really good job on that same thing. Thank you for doing that for us. I saw this, this worked really well. I notice so-and-so was playing in the back. Did you notice that?"

More frequent feedback conversations are central to supporting the continuous improvement of teachers by helping them reflect on their own practices with little stress. As the principal asserted:

> A conversation [should] just keep going, not "you do this bad, fix that." When I do a walk through, I might tell a teacher later in the day, "I saw what you did during that lesson. I really think you really improved from what we discussed last time. That was really a good lesson for us. I see you've made some of the changes we talked about, but try some of these new things to see if you can make it… you can do better".

The principal acknowledges that there are a lot of things that pull a school leader away from being involved in instruction. There are a lot of day-to-day details that take a lot of time. However, as the instructional leader, the principal tries "to keep [walkthroughs] as the main focus."

Reflective conversations. Besides conducting classroom observations that help individual teachers reflect upon and improve their practice, the principal holds meetings with teachers, encouraging them to work collaboratively with their peers to find the best ways to meet student needs. This includes seeking intervention programs to close the learning gaps of struggling students.

> So at this time of the year, I'll be doing a lot of observations with teachers, but I'm also meeting with them. We're trying to set up a lot of different programs for our students. We know where our students are at and many don't have the interventions they need. I'm trying to arrange schedules so that we can cover that for the students. So as an instructional [leaders], we're really focused on the students. My job is to make sure we have the strongest teachers to do that.

The principal understands the importance of healthy relationship with teachers as well as every member of the school community and maintains an open door policy. “Most of the time, … if they find me here [his office], the door is open, and they come in with a question or they come in with a request or they'll email me.” Therefore, informal conversations build the trust and professionalism that lead to more formal conversations. Evidence from the Teacher Questionnaire also showed that the principle uses the open communication strategy to encourage informal discussion about important issues and to promote mutual trust. One teacher mentioned that, “He is always open to listening to problems we have and helps us come up with solutions.”

Sub-theme B: Individual conversations that lead to formal evaluation. To support teachers making continuous improvement in their practices, the principal always discusses individual needs of students to determine areas of improvement. These conversations examine individual data with teachers during meetings throughout the year as a necessary part of this

process. Formal observations that include a pre- and post-conference are used to provide an opportunity for a teacher and the principal to have a conversation about instruction and student learning, and to collaborate on how to make adjustments accordingly as a result of their dialogue. As the principal described, “We have continuous meetings through the year with teachers. We review their data. I do observations of the teachers, and we discuss those observations then set a plan on where to go next.”

Goal- setting. At the beginning of each year, individual teachers self-evaluate their teaching practices and set two or three professional goals that will drive continuous improvement. The principal stated, “Each year, as I'm setting goals with teachers, we look at where they are based on the prior year. If they're new, we do some self-evaluation or have the teachers do an initial self-evaluation. I put out guidelines for the school and a staff handbook.”

> We’re looking at the whole rubric about areas that they may feel that they just haven't mastered or things they want to improve in their practice. They want to take it up to a higher level. So when we review this evaluation process and review the rubric, we try to find those areas that this teacher needs some help in and then we brainstorm ideas then complete organized plan. Some of our teachers like to plan together, and so they'll come up with a plan that can support each other as well, and that's also agreeable with the evaluation process. So, we start with the rubric and the data, and we see what areas teachers need help with and then build a goal-setting plan.

By designing goal setting, the principal expects teachers to focus on new ways of teaching in response to additional knowledge or feedback. He also expects teachers to take responsibility for their own professional growth, where they demonstrate that they are continuous learners in a way that meets the needs of students:

> We do have high expectations for our students as well, so [teachers] have to have those high expectations and expect that they can move students from where they are. So we want all our teachers to be learners as well. That's why we set our goals each year so that they each have a goal - something that they're going to work on so they improve their practice of teaching. And that varies from teacher to teacher… I also expect teachers to be developing something on their own. Some teachers, if they are newer teacher, may be taking classes, so they may need support with the work they do at [universities] or online. Other teachers are building their growth based on district initiatives.

To motivate teachers to take ownership of their continuous learning and growth, the principal encourages them to come up with goals on their own and develop strategies to accomplish their goals. Sometimes, the principal redirects teachers when their goals do not align with the district's standards:

> I do try to have them come up with the goals themselves … If it's not something I think is an area they need support on then I have to redirect that. But, I do try to have the teachers come in with all the materials that they have then manage their materials, manage their time, come up with the ideas, and I find ways that I can support them. Some teachers need more handholding, and I have to direct them a little bit more.

When teachers take charge of their own professional development, they recognize their strengths in the classroom, identify areas where they need to improve their practice, and plan with other staff members to keep data and student academics in the forefront. The principal believes that "these teachers are much more confident in their abilities and what they need to do to grow."

Growth plans. The principal collaborates with teachers to complete their goals using either a Professional Growth Plan (PGP) or Individualized Development Plan (IDP). With the tenured teachers, the principal encourages planning their PGPs based on a self-assessment. After reviewing and discussing that self-assessment, teachers must identify possible areas where they consider themselves weaker, set goals, then develop an accompanying plan on how to accomplish those goals. If the need arises, the principal holds a mid-year conference to discuss a teacher's progress on the PGP. Ongoing support is provided to help teachers set general goals for the following year.

> With PGP, each experienced teacher sets out their goals, and defines how they want to accomplish them. Then, I review the goals and may ask them to add some things or take some things out. I'll help them clarify their plans. If necessary, I do a mid-year follow-up plan with the teachers, and we have a meeting to make sure that they're still making progress. At the end of the year, we review their goals. They write a statement saying how they accomplish their goals, and I meet with them to set general goals for the following year or set some examples of things that we might want to work on.

With the probationary teachers, the principal directs goals development using an IDP that helps them to get started in the process and achieve sufficient progress. After the first year, beginning teachers are encouraged to complete an initial self-assessment to determine new areas of focus. The plan includes outlining the steps that each teacher will take, and the resources and support needed to make satisfactory progress toward professional goals. "I will help direct beginning teachers on what things I think they need to be working on, and we'll develop two to three goals with each of those new teachers. As we develop the goals, we outline the steps that they will take and then we outline the steps that I will take."

The principal confirmed that he spends more time with newer teachers, as they need more support with the evaluation process. “We haven't had as much time to teach them the process, teach them what they need to know. And with teachers, I've had a lot of discussions over the years on specifics in the program. So each year, I focus on maybe something different with everybody and then very specific things with specific teachers.”

Ongoing follow-up. Once goals and plans are set, the principal shared, “I do data reviews with teachers throughout the year, and then we do a summary at the end of the year.” Within this development process, the principal encourages teachers to identify specific skills based on learning needs and growth targets of their students.

> When I'm having teachers set goals, we set really specific goals - SMART goals [Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timely]. We make sure that they're very concrete goals on what students are learning then set a timetable. If necessary, I will meet with teachers at mid-year and ask, “How are you doing with meeting those goals. Have you done this? Have you done this?” We go through those goals to make sure they're on track to meeting them.

The process for self-improvement shared by the principal was strongly supported by the teachers. They appreciate the time that the principal takes to discuss professional goals and objectives at the start of the year. A number of teachers shared that “[the principal] always looks back at our learning goals from last year. We review and discuss them before deciding this year’s learning goals… He makes sure our goals are not too ‘lofty’ [and] … that our personal growth plans match our learning goals.” The principal understands that achieving identified SMART goals is based on how much time teachers take to focus on meeting their goals. In this regard, teachers asserted that the principal always works with them to “discuss goals and ideas

throughout the year during staff meeting. He sends encouraging emails through the year." One teacher mentioned that the principal shares his goals and models self-assessment to inspire teachers to be fully engaged in their own process of self-assessment. These ongoing discussions of goals throughout the year make the final evaluation more meaningful to teachers.

Formal observation. The principal shared the importance of having open conversations with teachers beginning with initial goal setting and during follow-up walkthrough observations. He described how these conversations continue into the formal observation process. Each observation cycle includes a review of a teacher's lesson plans, pre-observation conferencing, observation, reflection, and post-observation conferencing. He emphasized the necessity for teachers to be well prepared in using in-depth practices in the classroom so that all students can achieve high academic levels. Teachers are expected to develop thoughtful plans that include all components of the reading and math block, which they will then share with the principal the week before formal observations. The principal reviews the lesson plans to make sure they are adequate for what he needs during his observation and what teachers need for teaching.

During the pre-observation conference, the principal works with a teacher using the Danielson teacher evaluation checklist and the teacher's plans to determine the focus of a lesson, which will become the focus of the observation.

> They know I am going to come in next week. When they put the lesson plans in, I can review the plans ahead of time, so I'll be with the teacher saying, "I'm going to be coming in during your math lesson on one of these two days. What would you like me to look for?" So, I've already previewed their plans before talking with them, and they'll say, "Well, I want you to look at the activities that the students are doing while I'm teaching to make sure that they're listening and following directions" or something like that.

If needed, teachers are encouraged to improve their lesson plans by reviewing others' plans as a model to follow. “I spend a lot of time with teachers in the fall. We don't have one lesson plan format for teachers, so they have a preference, but if it's not sufficient for me to understand, I make them go back and change it until it's worthwhile. But I have other teachers’ lesson plans as examples.”

During the formal observation the principal combines information from the pre-observation conversation regarding what the teacher wants to accomplish with this lesson, the information on the Danielson checklist, and the teacher’s goals. As the principal observes, he takes notes. These notes are used during the post-observation conversation.

During the post-observation conference, teachers are encouraged to discuss their post-observation reflection with the principal. The engagement level of students is an important tool that the principal emphasizes so teachers can achieve more effective classroom practices. The principal always intends to be supportive during the process of self-evaluation to help teachers consider their own practices:

> I use [a completed post observation self-reflection form] to see how they can really judge how they're doing in the lesson. Sometimes…the lesson is going perfect; there is very little change needed. But still many of the best teachers are always questioning themselves, “What could I do better?” If I see that a teacher doesn't even see that a lesson may have gone badly then I need to instruct them in a different way, so I'm always having them reflect.

Self-evaluation and reflection. After the observation, the principal sets a time for teachers to do the self-evaluation before they sit down for the formal post-observation meeting. In completing the self-evaluation form, the principal encourages teachers to provide useful

information with very specific details. If not, the principal takes time during the post-observation meeting to ask a teacher follow-up questions for reflection. “It’s easier for me to see what's going on in their head… All the teachers are like my students. They’re all different, and so they need different approaches.”

Teachers should think about what worked and what did not work in their classroom to determine what they will be doing next to improve. An essential part of self-evaluation is to make continuous improvements in teaching strategies for better learning outcomes. The principal stated:

> The goal is to do [self-evaluation] continuously so that we're not just doing it because the paperwork is necessary, but my discussions for this year ended with OK so, “We've finished this practice for this year. What do you want to do for next year?” We have discussed already how we can start making changes for next year, so I try to keep that in mind as I'm having discussions with teachers. What are we going to do to improve for next year? This is not just an evaluation. This is your score, but we want to have the discussions as well.

The principal also explained the need for teachers to review student engagement in the lesson to examine students’ understanding of the lesson and ensure that they are achieving specific learning goals.

> We often, at the end of the lesson, also look at some student work to see, “Oh yes. See this child understood it. He did the process of adding with carrying on this paper. This one, he got partway through. He's just missing the last step, but this one he didn't get it at all. He was doing something completely different.” So we'll review student work sometimes to see if they understood it.

He recognizes that when a teacher is teaching a lesson, sometimes things don't go as planned, especially when a student did not understand a lesson or something happened amidst a teacher's instruction. In that case, the principal expects teachers to "change the lesson and [adjust] a little bit and do something completely different. That's part of the self-evaluation that teachers do after they finish a lesson." He shared some examples that illustrate when different things happen during a lesson to show that self-evaluation is an essential part of making improvements in teaching strategies for better learning outcomes.

The principal shared a reflective conversation that he held with a teacher who had faced some difficulties with applying some strategies in the classroom when trying to help her students. In this situation, he emphasized how the teacher's reflection helped to determine areas of improvement.

> I had a discussion with one teacher about just a little timing thing in the classroom and she thought she was trying to help students by doing something, but it was making it more complicated and affected other classrooms and schedules, so she just changed it last week and she goes, "I see what you mean. It's goes a lot smoother if I just keep it to that point and fix that." So, I also have teachers do a self-evaluation each year as well just to see what areas they need to work on as we set goals.

When the principal holds a professional conversation with teachers to improve teaching skills, they review student data and provide extra support. The principal admits that promoting reflective thinking in teachers is the main guide that leads to changes in their practice. However, that process takes time: "Making them [teachers] stop and change is hard."

During difficult conversations with teachers, the principal encourages them to come up with ideas on how to improve certain teaching skills, but at other times, he tries to be very directive when the expectations of student performance are not met:

> I say, “What you're doing is not adequate for the students, I need you to make these changes”… and I spell it out. I put it in writing and explain these are the expectations I expect them to start tomorrow or next week. Then, I'm going to be doing a follow up observation. Those are difficult conversations, but we try to keep it very professional, and I just let them know because everybody has a chance to improve.

Special support. Depending on what the principal saw, there will be either more observations or fewer observations following the post-observation meeting.

> If the lesson went well, and we discussed the things that worked, and teachers were experienced, I don't need to observe them as often. But, if I find that a teacher is having difficulty with an issue, I'll make suggestions or take their suggestions, and we come up with a plan. Then, I'll observe them in two weeks. Two weeks later, or one month later, after they have time to practice it and then we'll go over it again…

The principal holds follow-up meetings when teachers face difficulties in meeting school expectations or district initiatives.

> Sometimes, I refer them to other teachers. Sometimes I bring in a district coach, or I'll refer them to books or to online classes or online workshops they can take… If they have difficulty doing those [district or school expectations], then I will do follow up meetings with them... There are some teachers I meet with regularly to help them improve on either teaching skills or learning new skills.

The principal encourages teachers who are struggling to meet other teachers who are skilled in that particular area. He sets up time for classroom observation and discussion.

> We've just had our year-end teacher evaluation meetings, and there were many times during the meetings that teacher would ask a question and try to figure out how to do this. I said, "Well, I've got this teacher or these two teachers who do it very well. Let's set up some time where you can watch them and meet with them." Sometimes, they just need to have a discussion, and other times, they would like to go in and observe you.

To encourage teachers to continually change and improve their practice, the principal promotes self-reflective practices not only through the evaluation system but also through a culture of collaboration and professional learning. By encouraging collegial collaboration in assessing student progress, sharing ideas for responding to student needs, and reflecting on new teaching and learning opportunities, he enhances the quality of teaching. In this respect, the principal prioritizes finding the time and space to encourage teachers to build a professional learning community.

> So, it's a continuous process of reflecting, although that is challenging to do… [After holding a post-observation conference**],** I'll often take time again during professional development meetings, so [teachers] can reflect on the material and what they've learned, and how it affects them and their classroom practices... [Reflective practice is] built into our evaluation system. It's built into our culture of building professional development so that they continuously have to pause. Sometimes they need the time to discuss with each other and then take the time to reflect on their own practices. So we try to build opportunities for the discussion and then the reflection as well, because time is very short.

Theme 3: Engaging Teachers in a Teamwork Environment that Fosters a Solid Network for Collaborative Learning and Development

The principal understands that working within a collaborative, shared school culture that encourages open conversations and trusting relationships is a vital part of teacher professional growth and development. With that in mind, he considers it essential to provide teachers with opportunities to reflect on the achievements of their students, reflect on their own teaching practices, and support one another's practices within a safe and supportive environment. Creating a cultural shift in the school that focuses on collegiality and peer knowledge sharing is necessary to maximizing teacher learning:

> When I started teaching, everybody kind of taught in their classroom, and then teachers would maybe meet at lunch and talk a little bit about teaching. But, there wasn't enough growth. So I tried to build opportunities for discussions between teachers so they can learn from each other and try the things themselves in a safe place like their classroom before I'm observing it.

Sub-theme A: **Builds on formal conversations between teams.** The principal set out a clear expectation for every teacher "to be team players and work with their peers at grade levels and work with other staff members on projects." At every staff meeting, he encourages reflective conversations regarding instruction, which focus on grade level issues that can lead teachers to deeper levels of reflection on their individual needs. These collegial conversations provide a time for self-reflection.

> I can't do it at every meeting, but in some of the longer meetings, I take time for teachers to reflect on their teaching depending on what the subject areas that they're studying… [This allows] time to discuss with peers and then time to reflect on how it affects their practices. So, I try to make that time because they don't have the time to do it.

A specific example illustrates how the principal strives to manage each team meeting with a focus on building time for personal reflection that will set the stage for continuous improvement:

> During one meeting, we had teachers all sitting in groups at the table. They discussed ideas and were presenting different ideas and how to improve our school. After each idea, they would sit and discuss, and they would write notes on a sticky note then turn those in. As we went through that process, there were always two to three minutes to discuss an idea with each other. At the end, they had to write the notes to themselves so they had to stop and reflect on a practice that they would do themselves.

Facilitates the opportunities to work in teams. With the emphasis on teacher collaboration and reflection, the principal provides teachers with opportunities to develop strong teaching teams. This type of teamwork has encouraged teachers to continuously work with colleagues to plan for and reflect on instruction, share ideas to incorporate techniques with new programs, and form a stronger network that contributes to school improvement and student success.

> Teachers collaborate with one another on how to plan for a lesson, how to best present the information, and plan with each other on how to use technology in education. I know that with our new math program, when trying to figure out how to teach the new math, they would often talk and run ideas by each other…teachers networked with each other through e-mails and through even text [messages] sometimes about things that were working and not working.

The principal recognizes that working intensively on building a collaborative teams has created synergy for problem solving where teachers enjoy bonding and supporting one another to

make teaching a more sustainable career. “There are many staffs that are a little divisive, and they're just trying to take care of themselves. But, I do work a lot with the teams, and I think teachers here help each other a lot.” This approach proved important during a recent school year when a number of staff members were absent for several days because of dealing with family situations. The principal stated, “Unfortunately this year that happened a lot. [However] teachers and staff pulled together to help each other to make it through a difficult time with aging and ill families.” By supporting colleagues in their time of need, these teachers ensured that the affected classrooms ran smoothly by checking the lesson plans, making sure that materials were prepared, and meeting student needs.

Through team-building activities, teachers have become increasingly interested in sharing the different insights that they have learned with their peers.

> They [teachers] ask about attending [conferences], and then I ask them to come back and share with the staff what they've learned… Through our e-mails, teachers will share a lot of information as well. [In addition], I forward articles to teachers or discuss them in staff meetings, but teachers now feel comfortable sharing with other teachers.

Schedules collaborative time that supports continuous reflection. For elementary teachers, a lack of planning time represents a barrier to supporting reflective practice and continuous improvement. However, the principal recognized the necessity for making collaborative time available to encourage self-reflection.

> We don't have enough planning time built into our elementary school day. The teachers know it. I know it. There is more planning time if you're a middle school teacher or a high school teacher. But in elementary, you have the planning time, or lunch. Without having (adequate) time, it's difficult to reflect.

To solve some of the problems with finding time, the principal shared a model adopted by the kindergarten teachers who have been using the lunchtime for their own PD meetings. Once a week they have some common planning time to collaborate and prepare certain lessons, share and brainstorm ideas, and help each other with the practical aspects of presenting materials. This involves discussing plans for special events for a holiday, reviewing data, and teaching each other how to enter data into the school reporting system. The principal has been supportive by providing resources or tools that facilitate lesson preparation and presenting activities to students.

> They [kindergarten teachers] … [shared that they] needed some special counters to use that didn't come with the program. I found it was in our budget. So, we ordered those and they could prepare all the lessons… They wanted to present this activity to the students… The following week, they talked about… what went well, what didn't go well, and how could they could improve [the activities] for the following year.

The principal believes that providing that shared planning time motivates teachers to work together toward developing some solutions and implementing their decisions in ways that will best benefit their students. He is planning to set more opportunities for teachers to work collaboratively, although he acknowledges that there are challenges because next year's schedule is already tight. That plan also includes incorporating the kindergarten team's model in the schedule to build extra time for all grades.

> We're trying to build in a schedule where we can meet as grade level teams and cross-grade level teams more frequently than what the contract or teaching contract allows… I'm looking at all the schedules for next year to see what I can change to make it so that they all have some time together.

To inspire applying the kindergarten teachers' approach as a model of how successful collaboration can increase student achievement, the principal shared that:

> We've shown the [kindergarten teachers'] data. We shared the data with the staff and how they made so much growth, more growth than everybody else… There's been a number of times where we have to get things done, and we've had teachers use that mutual planning time, so they could work together to come up with solutions.

Some elements from the Teacher Questionnaire strongly aligned with promoting and supporting teacher collaboration and team building. Teachers shared that the principal encourages grade level meetings and organizes time for staff members to check lesson plans, plan together, and share ideas. According to a teacher, "Teacher collaboration is highly encouraged and effective… [the principal] talks during meetings [and] provides time for reflection…Teachers share ideas and practices." Without providing and encouraging these formal conversations between teams, the principal understands that teachers will not be able to improve their skills within a positive school culture to boost student outcomes.

Implements peer teacher observation. To promote continuous conversations, the principal emphasizes the importance of supporting peer observation as a reflective practice activity that develops collaborative efforts among teachers. Through reflecting on his own teaching experience, the principal understands that usually "teachers don't know how other teachers teach. I know when I started as a literacy coach, I thought everybody did all the things I did, but when I went into some classrooms (I could) see what other teachers are doing."

The school started implementing this form of professional development during the current school year, where teachers are regularly exposed to other ways of teaching and learning.

However, some teachers are resistant or reluctant to be observed and engage with one another in reflective conversation:

> [We are] still trying to draw that line where some teachers don't want other teachers to see what they're doing. They just have never done it this way before, so it's very different for them to be open and have so many people coming in to observe. There are some teachers who are very resistant to it and don't want to do it… That's a big concern for teachers because they don't want that to be part of their evaluation. They want it to be something for self-improvement.

In attempting to help teachers feel comfortable in actively participating in opportunities for peer-to-peer observation, the principal decided to use these observations as a part of the self-evaluation process and not the formal evaluation process.

> We try to really separate [peer observation] so that it's not part of the evaluation process… when [teachers] want help. "How do I fix this? How do I make this better?" So it's not part of teacher evaluation, but we do a part of the self-evaluation process to come up with ideas and how to improve teaching throughout.

The instructional rounds walk-throughs are tied to the High Impact Leadership (HIL) grant that the school is participating in allows teachers to observe peers. Some teachers were trained over the summer on how to do instructional rounds that focus on non-judgmental classroom observations. The principal initially offers probationary teachers an opportunity to visit classrooms and observe experienced teachers, who share instructional techniques that improve math or reading teaching practices. He then increases opportunities through the HIL Project by ensuring that everyone is trained well enough on the process, so it becomes a continuous improvement process. These friendly visits help all teachers become open for

learning through observing and become accustomed to having many teachers visit their classrooms and identify areas of improvement.

> With the starting of the high impact literacy groups, we are trying…to get more teachers working with each other as well and seeing what practices they can improve on. At the end of the year, we kind of reflect on, 'Did the teachers meet their goals?' It's not an evaluation of a teacher. It's looking for trends, and people just make little factual notes and we combine all the factual notes to come up with data to set goals.

Sub-theme B: Developing community collaboration and engagement. The principal seeks to strengthen teacher and staff collaboration through including parents and community members in achieving the school's mission and goals.

> I've worked with [teachers], but it's not just the teachers. I also have to work with the other staff in the building, so that's the cafeteria people, Title I tutors, the office staff, and the school community parent teacher organization. That also ties into the [school's] Neighborhood Association, making sure that we're a community resource and that we're a good neighbor to our community members… We do have expectations for all of them to work with students and work with the teachers to make this a good place for learning.

The principal believes in the importance of working with parents and communities as a partnership to build a strong community that supports student learning and success.

> I think [our collaborative school culture emerges] when we have parents, teachers, and administrators working together to improve student learning. Sometimes, all three are working together. Sometimes, two are working together for certain things, like the administration and the teachers for one thing or the teachers and the parents for another.

> For other goals, it's all three of us working together. In all, it's to prepare students for life and an education.

The principal acknowledges the unique contribution that the community makes to help build a positive learning environment. Community recourses are provided mostly through the Communities in Schools, which includes volunteers providing mentoring and extra support.

> [Communities in Schools] helps us with a lot of volunteers and tutors as well. So they help organize a group of reading tutors that comes in and helps our students. They're organizing some math tutors or the Math Counts Program through [a university], but they're also working with different people to come in and mentor students, and different people to counsel our students as well. So there's community research, and they help align the community to the resources that we need. So when we have students whose glasses break, and they need glasses but their families can't afford them, the [Communities and Schools Organization] helps make the arrangements to get glasses. That's how a community resource helps a child, so they can read, so they can learn and improve. There are a lot of different people involved in different ways.

Direct interaction between teachers and parents is encouraged in ways that support student learning in a specific subject area. Thus, when setting goals for the school, teachers and the principal work together to develop goals with input from the parents and students as well.

> We did surveys with students, parents and staff about the learning that goes on, the behavior management and health of students. [We asked], “Are we a safe place to learn?”

The principal also encourages developing a school community through having older students take an active role in the school success. One new program involves having older

students take responsibility for engaging younger students in the learning process and encouraging positive behaviors.

> We asked our fifth graders to do a lot this year with teaching our younger students about how to be kind and help each other. They did that with some speaking to classrooms, some putting signs up in the hallway, and certain presentations that they did for the staff and students.

The principal realizes the importance of teacher collaboration in supporting their professional growth, which has resulted in communities working together within and beyond the school. The principal has facilitated a leadership path where teachers can feel empowered to lead both inside and outside classrooms and positively influence others, whether individually or collectively, in improving student outcomes.

> We are trying to promote a teacher leader network, so they can help each other because they're the ones who talk with each other the most. And I'm only one person with 25 teachers. But, as a grade level, they can help each other - three teachers together, four teachers together. That network can be a stronger network and improve teaching a lot faster.

Working collaboratively with classroom teachers to share leadership and responsibility for student learning has become a fundamental part of the principal's leadership efforts.

> I do put teachers in charge of a lot of things. I think that if you're a teacher, you have to lead your own classroom. We do try to build on those strengths and those same leadership skills. I do a lot with the strength space management. “What you are doing well? Then, build on that….” [Teachers] take the ideas from the other teachers so that

> they can listen and find out what other teachers are doing, so I build those discussions as much as I can.

The principal recognizes that listening to teachers plays a crucial role in the process of cultivating and expanding their leadership capabilities.

> Our teachers are going through a lot of different things. There are new, young teachers, teachers getting married and having kids, teachers whose kids are graduating, and people who are close to retirement. You have to listen and see what the needs of the teachers are because they change. They're trying to balance their professional life and personal life. And, they're trying to see how they can improve. I'm trying to build that leadership capacity in the teachers, so the listening [to them] is the biggest thing.

Theme 4: Cultivates Leadership in Teachers to Increase Confidence in their Abilities and Responsibilities

The principal has identified a number of experienced teachers who have demonstrated superior teaching skills. Working closely with these teachers for several years has enabled the principal to recognize their specific strengths and consider ways to utilize them to mentor and inspire others. Learning from these expert teachers is always encouraged to get focus on specific areas or how to employ certain classroom instructional techniques. “If they [teachers] have questions about reading, there are two or three [expert] teachers that they'll go to specifically first. We have a couple of teachers who are experts in technology. Technology questions go to those teachers who try to come up with something new.” The principal emphasized that empowering these teacher leaders with trust and professional autonomy has made a great impact on driving professional development.

> I've had to learn to trust the teachers to lead some of the initiatives, and find the teachers who are leaders, and let them lead a group of teachers, let them lead professional

> development, and let them organize activities. I think that works best because often principals don't stay for 10 years in a school. Most principals change much more frequently, but the teachers will often just keep staying and staying. So, I empower the teacher as a leader.

Sub-theme A: Empowers teachers to assume various leadership roles. To leverage a teacher's individual strengths, the principal aims to "use them to be leaders with the other teachers." The principal recognizes that being a leader is a responsibility that teachers enjoy, and so he tries to support them taking leadership positions. Every year, teachers who are experts in different subject areas are encouraged to sign up as committee leaders in areas such as reading specialists, math specialists, and science specialists. Based on their areas of expertise, these coach-leaders work to develop other teachers' skills. They attend district meetings and share information and ideas with all teachers. The principal also encourages teachers to seek out other leadership opportunities to extend and enrich their profession:

> Additionally, for each grade level we have a grade level facilitator, and that facilitator sets up the grade level meetings, prepare agendas, help present the information for all the teachers, and work as a teacher leader…We have a team for behavioral support…we also have academic literacy leaders through the High Impact Leadership (HIL) grant. These are leaders who are going to be working with other teachers by helping develop the reading literacy leadership in the building and helping develop that literacy culture.

The principal believes in shared leadership that nurtures a professional learning community where creative problem solving ideas are inspired. He understands that substantial participation of others in leadership roles is essential for building a sense of collective ownership and shared responsibility for learning and development.

> When I give teachers the autonomy to organize things in the school, they come up with a lot better ideas than I would come up with myself. So, I do promote [problem solving] with the staff to come up with the ideas and help run [activities] because I'm away at too many meetings, I have too many things, so I can't do it, and it takes all of us to really run the building. I work on building their leadership skills.

Sub-theme B: Trusts teachers to organize different school activities. To further build leadership capacity in teachers, the principal tries to find ways to support their ideas and suggestions. The principal shared an example of one teacher who organized a STEM day for science technology engineering and math where she worked on district committees and worked with math coaches as a voluntary activity to improve her practices. The teacher used her strengths in math and science to organize the activity. "She organized the science fair, she organized the presenters, and she organized the whole schedule, which helped our school community learn about science, math, and technology, and really inspired many of the students [to want to learn more about STEM]."

Within the classroom environment, the principal also motivates teachers to come up with ideas and suggestions that can foster student growth and success. For example, some teachers come up with ideas on how to teach their unit plans even though the curriculum guide suggests different approaches.

> There are times when a curriculum guide tells us what we need to teach throughout the year, but many times, teachers come up and say "I have an idea. I want to teach the unit this way. I know the curriculum guide says this, but I want to do this because…" If they can give me examples or if they can give me the ideas, I say, "Well, that's a good idea. Let's try it and see." So, if teachers come up with ideas, I try to support their ideas.

Developing leadership capacity also includes providing teachers opportunities to work together as peers to organize and prepare many different activities in the school.

> Our teachers come together in small groups of two or three or four and say, 'Okay, we need to make this better.' And, they come up with ideas. They present them to the staff, and we change how we do things based on what teachers present to us. And our teachers are the ones who organize our literacy night and our math night. They touch base with me as far as budgets and ideas. Once I approve it, they do all the work organizing it. They bring a lot of things to our school because they have so many wonderful ideas and one person can't do them all.

A group of teachers came up with ideas for developing their own system for dismissal procedures. They realized the need to make changes to the entry and dismissal procedures to enhance student safety. Teachers came together and brought their ideas and suggestions then presented them to the school staff.

> One of the things that we have when I try to organize our entry and dismissal procedures with all 400 students is that I start out with a plan but then some teachers say, "We need to change that. This isn't safe over here." [I suggested that they] put their ideas down on paper and present them. And they did. They had better ideas and taught the staff. We made a lot of changes to the way we do entry and dismissal based on teacher suggestions.

Over the summer, teachers are encouraged to take additional PD classes or participate in some training so they can share their learning with others when the school year started. For instance, several teachers attended Education for the Arts training, so they could teach others how to incorporate the arts into education. The principal worked with several teachers on professional development about behavior management for three days. Other teachers lead the

HIL Grant program through a local university where they met during the summer with a facilitator. On their own, teachers organized Phase 1 activities for literacy that they would incorporate in the upcoming school year, and worked together to come up with ideas that would help improve the reading skills of students and build the literacy culture. The principal emphasized how shared leadership has enhanced the professional learning community:

> This is a teacher leadership role that they're [teachers are] taking on, so they can work with their peers to improve the teaching of reading. Then, from my discussions with teachers, some of [the trained teachers] want to work with other teachers in the fall, so they can try to take some of the practices to improve instruction -especially with the small targeted groups and small group instruction. So I think it really helps us having these teachers lead these programs, because it's something they feel very strongly about. They have peers that they can share with.

Giving leadership opportunities to teachers is crucial. The principal has built the leadership skills of teachers, so they can stay positive and connected to the school community, and in turn be motivated to continuously learn and grow.

> I think there's been a lot of research and a lot of books about [teacher leaders]. There are many teachers who don't want to be an administrator. They don't consider a step out because their calling is in the classroom. I think that by supporting the teachers, they will feel like they're improving. Our teachers are the ones who are also leading the professional development for the district at times, and it's letting teachers know that they’re cherished for their value and for what they bring to the profession.

Evidence from Teacher Questionnaire illustrated that the principal develops teacher leaders and encourages teachers to use their own ideas, and that he is open to any suggestions on

how to help students learn along with how to build a positive learning environment. According to teachers, “He recognizes individual achievement and projects… He’s always complimentary and ‘brags’ about the things the staff does.” He also knows teachers’ “strengths and passion and encourages developing strengths and working on areas that are identified.” This constant encouragement inspires teachers to move forward and take leadership roles.

Principal Three - Case Description

The third principal interviewed leads an elementary school in a small community in Southwest Michigan that serves 538 students. Of these students, 89% are White and 11% are a small variety of other racial backgrounds. During 2017-18, 45% were economically disadvantaged through free and reduced lunch statistics. These students are supported by 41 teachers in 23 classrooms. Of these teachers, 23 hold bachelor’s degrees and 18 hold master’s degrees with an average of nine years of experience.

Before entering education, Principal Three had a background in restaurant and hotel management. Although her mother was a teacher, the principal did not have any interest in following her mom’s path. When she volunteered in her daughter’s first grade classroom, “I found I was a natural with the kiddos and loved my time in the classroom. I also found that the schedule in hotel management was not very family friendly. I also have to say that teaching is in my blood.” At that point, she decided to complete a bachelor’s degree to earn a teaching certificate in K-8. During her eight years of teaching, she attained a Master’s in Educational Leadership. Principal Three has been a principal for 12 years, four of which were at her current elementary school. She is currently working on her Ph.D. in Educational Leadership, which will enable her to focus on an area that she is passionate about. With a PhD, she feels that she will have other professional options, such as teaching at the university level.

Presentation of Themes and Sub-Themes

Three major themes emerged as essential activities and behaviors that Principal Three has used to build a collaborative school culture that empowers teachers to be more professional and autonomous through continuous learning and growth. The major themes show that this principal:

1. Supports a Collaborative Culture that Serves as a Building Block
2. Promotes a Growth Mindset in Teacher Practices
3. Involves the Whole School in the Process of Creating Culture of Shared Leadership

These themes are support with sub-themes and elements that were expressed by the principal, a teacher at the school and, in some cases, documentation.

Theme 1: Supports a Collaborative Culture that Serves as a Building Block

Principal Three encourages a school culture that is clearly understood and supported by everyone. She feels that this requires building a shared language and a common understanding, so teachers can come together to address any challenge. The principal expressed that working within that culture will empower everyone, teachers and students, to grow and learn on a continuous basis.

> The culture of the building is one of the most important things. I have a question in my interview that asks, 'What do you think is the most important thing in a school building?' … To me it's the clarity of culture. If that's strong, then you can get through the hard stuff. You can keep growing and learning together. And that filters down to the kids that filters into the families.

The principal realizes that sustaining a strong school culture requires a continuous process of engaging all members of the school community in working together to achieve top

performance. This creates a sense of teamwork where each individual teacher feels supported and motivated to support colleagues. In this regard, the principal tries to identify the strengths of teachers to promote a culture of support and collaboration, including "having teachers help teachers with new learning. Some people find that technology is really easy for them, other people can share new practices and instruction that's easy for them." Moreover, she tries to maintain strong teaching teams by ensuring that all members are working together to create a truly shared vision that will create a sense of ownership. Showing a commitment to that collaboration is also necessary when a new team member is hired. The principal stated:

> My first grade team was looking to hire, and they're not quite totally onboard where I thought they were going to be with this person I want to hire. So I'm not going to make my decision yet because I've got to make sure that they feel like this person is going to be collaborative. At the same time, I also know that student achievement is important, and I want to make sure I have a talented teacher as well as a person who's going to fit well with their team. I want both. I want it all when it comes to setting up our team.

The principal emphasizes that building a positive, strong school culture that promotes learning and engagement for students and teachers is imperative, however, that is not easily done and should not be done by one person. She recognizes how a school culture is the core of improvement and growth, and thus, she fosters her notion of learning and growth, which she learned from other schools, during collegial and collaborative activities to maintain continuous improvement in the school.

> When we're talking about culture, because culture is our big focus, you can never rely on just sitting back. It's a proactive thing that you always have to engage in. I feel like we're in a good trend… it's never a job that's done when you're talking about a culture… I think

> culture is always something you're going to work on, always keep reading, always keep learning from others. I am part of the Michigan principal group because I learn from so many other great principals… I think culture is something that should always be a big rock. We shared with teachers this year culture first, culture next, culture always.

In reflecting on how she models learning from others that is vital to enhancing collaborative learning and development in the school, the principal added,

> You know I'm a reader. I love to keep up ---. I think social media helps me know what's going on. I'm always trying to figure out what all these other people are doing to say, " I want to learn from that." So fostering my own learning helps foster the learning here. I share with the teachers that I'm on the executive board of the Michigan Principals Association, so I'm letting them know that I venture out. I want to know more about what's going on. I can come back and say, "You know another school has this going on." Or, I can share. "Hey, we tried this, and this other school tried it, too, and they got this." So, if I can foster the whole idea of growing from other schools and others like other principals, and I think that helps them, it fosters them learning from other teachers.

To build on that, the principal informed her school staff that there was a graduate student who wants to conduct a research study about teachers' professional growth and development, "I think that helps them know that there's learning beyond just [this school district]." The important element is that the principal models that she values learning.

Sub-theme A: Incorporating school-wide leadership habits into the culture of the school community. The core of the school culture is built around *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen Covey (2012). The first three habits are focused on improving personal and professional aspects of individual teachers to move them from dependence to

independence. The next three habits encourage the development of strong teams through collaboration, so individuals can move from independence to interdependence. The seventh habit focuses on maintaining a commitment to continuous improvement while incorporating all the other habits.

> [*The 7 Habits* encourage] deep professional learning that helps all of us grow not just professionally but also personally. We have a better understanding of giving to each other because we're trying to "Think Win-Win" for all of us. We're trying to be more proactive than reactive. I feel foundationally they are good life practices that help us have an understanding for all the work that we do.

In collaboration with her school's Building Leadership Team (BLT), the principal has incorporated the 7 Habits program into every school day's strategies and activities. The 7 Habits have served as the foundation for a common language by encouraging quality professional development and support.

> The foundation here is really based on our 7 Habits. I started with the adults before we taught it to kids. We have a shared language and common understanding of those 7 habits right there on that wall. Every classroom has these habits. Every teacher has been trained, every staff member, and it continues even with a new teacher being hired. We get them trained.

By establishing a common language for discussing teaching and learning, the principal ensures that the entire school staff will focus on building social, emotional, and academic growth of each student. These goals were referred to as Wildly Important Goals, or WIG. This year's focus was *Together…We Are Building Leaders!* Teaching students the 7 Habits has become an essential part of the school's expectations for creating a leadership culture where students are

encouraged to put their new habits into practice, so they can grow as leaders and thrive in the 21st century. The principal puts great efforts into promoting *The Leader-In-Me* model that reinforces the 7 Habits practices with a culture that promotes student independence and gives them a voice within a social-emotional learning community. In order to build a shared leadership language, the principal recognizes the need to teach the 7 Habits to the adults first so that they can personally internalize them and integrate them into their teaching and model them for their students.

The principal expressed her impression about using the 7 Habits to promote a shared language among teachers... "I think [the language] is what I can definitely feel confident about. It's great to have this shared common language of the 7 Habits." She feels that purposeful common language can build a collaborative culture because the whole staff understands what is important and how to implement ideas that support the whole school. The teacher acknowledged in the Teacher Questionnaire, the principal "has the entire school participate within the *Leader in Me* and *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* programs." Because teachers share their participation in school-wide programs, the principal has been able to establish the importance of building a culture using these programs.

Setting regular staff and grade level meetings. The principal sets weekly staff and grade level meetings, but she emphasized the meetings of each collaborative teacher team to discuss issues. Teachers are encouraged to start these meetings by having conversations about Student Learning Objectives (SLO) to track the learning of each student and identify areas for improvement.

> A collaborative teacher team is what we call our grade level teams when they meet. They have these meetings each week, and they can have a protocol about what went well this

> week, who learned what, and what students fall out. So they keep the kids at the forefront of their conversations… We look at the [student learning objective, or SLO] data for two goals – one for literacy and one for math. We start with that, with those results. Then we think about, "OK, what's beyond the scores, what evidence do we have?"

With the collaborative focus on student learning, the principal also encourages time with instructional coaches who are assigned from the school district to work directly with teachers to help improve their practices. This coaching system provides ongoing support in the content areas of language arts and math, such as implementing small group instruction to maximize student learning.

> We have professional learning communities where [teachers] are meeting together talking about their kids and some of the things they're trying as well as having their instructional coaches. It gives them that time and place already set. So, they really are going to talk about how they're getting results in the classroom with their kids.

A teacher shared in the Teacher Questionnaire that the principal is trying to make the grade level meetings work and center on student learning needs by analyzing and acting upon student data.

> However, due to the many issues that end up as part of the staff meetings, there is usually very little time left to specifically focus on solving instructional strategies and student learning… There is an attempt at this through grade level meetings and staff meetings but those usually end up being sessions more devoted to discussing curriculum issues or district initiatives leaving little time for focused collaboration on classroom practice.

The teacher emphasized that providing more focused time would encourage "learning from each other … [and] better collaboration among teachers working on specific instructional

issues." Even though the principal wants teachers to focus on teaching and learning during grade level meetings, this teacher expressed, more time is needed to adequately achieve this goal.

Setting staff meetings to support school-wide leadership habits as a base for addressing problems. To develop grade level teams, the principal introduced Covey's 7 Habits as an organized approach to problem-solving and decision-making. By discussing and modeling the 7 Habits, the principal ensures that teachers are using the same language, one that they also use with their students. This has been helpful for leading proactive staff meetings that address issues of teaching and learning where individual teachers share collective responsibility in promoting a shared language to accomplish work in the school.

> When I'm leading a staff meeting, I say for sure, "OK, how are we going to be proactive on this? How are we going to approach this problem and try to make sure that we get to the solution before it even becomes a problem? … If we Think Win-Win, what can we come up with?" It helps if you are not taking things personally because it's just a common understanding of what we all want so things work out for all of us.

The principal described a situation where teachers used the 7 Habits to address some issues with student behavior. She encouraged everyone to be proactive instead of reactive (The first habit is "Be Proactive") and to plan with the end in mind (The second habit is to "Begin with the End in Mind"). Merging these habits into teaching practices facilitates thinking positively about how to help students learn as well as plan for success by keeping the desired end in mind.

> We're always talking about setting goals, so we can kind of focus around goals and have a shared common goal that helps us think about what it is we're accomplishing. Then, we know when we get there. Because, if we just keep [to the goal], we really actually know

> when we get to the end. If not, we might feel like we're never going to accomplish anything.

The principal believes that by thinking backwards on every step to take, teachers will clearly envision the desired outcomes for students' learning, and thus, build teaching strategies along the way. In this way, the principal ensures professional practices that enhance student learning.

> I want teachers to always be thinking about what's in their circle of control that they can do... Then, make sure that they're proactive in assisting student learning and not reactive when things get hard by getting mad. I want their professional practice to always be self-reflective, so they can think about how they can help growth in a proactive approach.

Models and incorporates school-wide leadership habits. As the principal sets the environment where teachers can share a common way for looking at problems, she usually shares habit boosters during staff meetings to teach and reinforce the particular habit that is assigned to each month of the school year. She realizes the necessity of providing teachers with different resources for deepening their understanding of each habit, such as having access to different websites or videos. This will also improve their professional skills by integrating each habit into their lessons and daily classroom discussions. In this way, these principles truly become an integral part of the language that everyone shares on a daily basis.

> [The 7 Habits] really become part of the language that we share. We do Habit Boosters at staff meetings where we have video clips or things that I share with the staff, or maybe they do a little habits focus for their kids every month. We actually always do a habits focus. So this month, it's all about "Sharpen the Saw"- Habit 7...Next year, we already

> know what we're going to be doing for this common understanding of language. We've already got it planned out for the whole year.

The principal further explained how she constantly shares the Habit Boosters to help teachers embrace the 7 Habits in their teaching practice.

> At staff meetings, I might say, "Okay, we've got to do a Habit Booster on Habit 1 this month because that's our focus." I put a video in during a staff meeting or maybe even just during my weekly share out of communication, so they can look at it on their own time… [The videos] are pretty applicable to what experiences adults have nowadays, like managing time.

During a staff meeting, the principal introduced two powerful lessons from Franklin Covey (2012) to encourage students to take time to consider the best choices before acting. By encouraging teachers to model this tool in the classrooms, the principal ensures a positive learning environment where students are taking responsibility for their own actions and attitudes and are always seeking to address issues with more self-control. Students will have an opportunity to develop the habits to be leaders. The principal explained that:

> This year, we started with two big lessons. I modeled these for the teachers in our staff meeting. I said, "These are two great lessons that you could teach your kids right off the get go." If we can get our kids to have more self-control and not worry about things that are out of their control, and if we can get kids to stop and think before they respond, we can talk about what a great environment we can have.

As the principal modeled these powerful tools, she shared a personal experience as an example to focus on what she can control and when she can make a better choice. Her example was how she tries to use the "pause button" when her husband frustrates her with laundry. This

was to help teachers understand that it is important to pause instead of getting frustrated right away. “My example to my teachers was just about how I use Stop and Think, and how we can get our kids to learn it. You know I just shared with them my own experience of having to use my pause button when my husband frustrates me with laundry.”

The principal recognized that modeling the language of 7 Habits is important for student learning. Through modeling the habits in direct interaction with students and staff, the principal makes the habits an integral part of her daily action with everyone by embedding them in her leadership practices.

> I feel like it's just part of what I do all the time. Habit 4 tells the students that you know Win-Win is even better than compromising. “Think Win-Win” is really about taking both ideas and trying to mesh them into one idea that is a better and new idea. So, I use that when I talk to kids all the time... If you model [a habit] all the time, I think it helps. Like I'll be saying something and the words just roll. It's just how we operate now. I don't have to think about the language as much... It's embedded in me a little bit. I think some of the teachers have it more than others, but if we just keep on the same track and keep bringing it back to the kids, the teachers keep having to use it and teach it until it becomes part of who they are.

The principal considers habit one as a critical element to her leadership approach. Over the years as a school leader, she has tried to be proactive in understanding others and being aware of the challenges that they face, such as having a family problem.

> The more years you do the job I think the better it is... Like this morning, I went down and talked to one of my support staff members because I just wanted to check in with her and see what the problem was. trying to be proactive and aware is a big goal for me,

because maybe as a principal, I get caught up in other things, and I have to make sure it's about the people.

The second habit, Begin with the End in Mind, is also important for the principal to consider during a planning time. “I really try to think backwards about what we want done, and for each month, what we are going to look at. So, that one is definitely one I think about when my planning habits that are important to me.”

Moreover, habit 5, Seek First to Understand then to be Understood, is a huge part of the principal’s work when solving problems. Listening to others is necessary for understanding problems before jumping to solutions or conclusions. The principal admitted that she needs to work more on this habit because listening is the most essential communication skill for building strong relationships with others. **“**Habit 5 is a big one for solving problems because if I don't even know what the problem is, I'm not going to be able to help solve it. I can't jump to conclusions, because it slows me down a little bit. That's probably the habit I've got to work on the most - listening.”

Sub-Theme B: Encouraging open communications that build trust. As previously mentioned, this principal facilitates a weekly team meeting where teachers plan together based on examining data to gain a deeper understanding of student needs and develop active teaching strategies. She understands that expanding these grade level teams is important for supporting a teacher’s professional learning and development. With that in mind, the principal has come to believe that giving trust and grace to one another is a critical factor in building a culture of open communication and collaborative learning. A big message she shares is that it is okay to make mistakes. Another message is that teachers have differences in teaching practices, and those differences are effective with some students but may not work with others.

> We have a real belief here that we give grace, meaning we make mistakes and we are going to give grace to one another, and having strong trust in the building is super important to me… We have a high trust environment. We know what we expect and how we give each other grace. If we have a person who comes in and is only thinking about themselves and their own needs, that will definitely squelch that collaborative culture… Our habits define who we are as professionals. When it comes to being a professional in this building, we give each other grace but we have high expectations, and we know our common language helps us have the same vision for what we're expecting from one another.

At the beginning of a school year, the principal distributes a one-page summary about the importance of giving grace to others and making the best assumptions about a person. She encourages teachers to assume the best instead of assuming the worst and to give each other "the benefit of the doubt, believing that … they had the best intentions and we trust one another. And, when we make mistakes, we give each other grace. That's going to help build that collaborative culture." The principal feels that giving grace to one another will inspire every member in the school to "move through the early sticking moments and gather enough momentum to stay the course."

Expanding collaborative learning. To further support collaboration during grade level meetings, the principal brings a wide variety of data that enhances professional conversations among teachers that leads to a systemic and ongoing review of data that guides instructional decisions. This includes adding behavior data when teachers meet to discuss the school's culture, leadership, and academic goals.

> Well, we'll continue [collaborative teacher teams and] maybe bring more data. We have some data but need to be more data minded when it comes to those meetings… We need to come prepared with the data. The last meeting that we had, we had behavior data, too, so teachers were looking at it.

This principal supplies data in a purposeful manner in order to give teachers time to examine one layer of data, discuss that data then make and implement plans that will improve student achievement. The additional layer of behavioral data added to the regular academic data may lead to a more difficult discussion. The principal has made time for the behavioral analysis and discussion.

In an effort to expand teacher leaders who share and learn from each other, the principal plans and prepares for district team meetings "where [teachers] come together and go through some learning cycles. We're going to be implementing some learning videos next year." The district meetings give teachers opportunities to support each other's learning and professional growth by involving them in taking a leadership role, such as leading staff meetings and sharing new videos concerning particular teaching/learning practices. As teachers exhibit leadership in multiple positions, the principal wants to give them opportunities to be successful so they remember that they are lifelong learners and lifelong leaders.

> In staff meetings, I want [teachers] to be the ones in front leading some of the Habit work so maybe we're going back to … thinking about us as learners. If we're lifelong learners and lifelong leaders, [we're] making sure that the staff doesn't forget that part. As teachers, they always need the teacher habit …to be reflective about how they're going to support each other. So giving them an opportunity to share, gives them time to do that [reflection]

Evidence from the Teacher Questionnaire reinforced the notion that the principal builds teacher leadership capacity by encouraging teachers to share their ideas and practices to engage in collaboration and stay motivated in learning and growing in instructional practices. According to the teacher "Teachers are encouraged to create sessions to teach other teachers instructional practices in which they excel at."

Sharing responsibilities of leadership with teachers. To encourage teachers to become more engaged leaders who are committed to supporting each other's learning and professional growth, the principal creates more opportunities for shared leadership where teachers lead and contribute to important decisions. She pointed out the different leadership roles that teachers are encouraged to be part of.

> We definitely want to grow as lifelong learners, lifelong leaders. We want our teachers to take leading positions, so we have chairs for each grade level, we have our building leadership team here, and we have our content chairs…so teachers have leadership roles…teachers are actually teaching and leading in these opportunities.

The chairs for grade level teams and school improvement chairs are a district determination, but the principal can recommend some teachers who would be great for the chair positions. "I might tell our district curriculum coordinator, 'so and so would make a great chair' like our fourth grade chair was *Ms. X* this year because I recommended she'd be great for that position." As the grade level chairs are assigned to focus on different content areas, the principal and the district want representatives on the content team who will make decisions not only for their school but also for the whole district.

Grade level chairs meet five times a year at different elementary schools in the district after the school day ends. Grade level and content area chairs collaboratively lead the meetings,

set the agendas ahead of time, share what has been discussed with school principals, and follow-up with team members on the "work" that has been accomplished.

The principal also supports teachers to become part of the Lighthouse Team, a leadership team that meets regularly to discuss the school's goals under the school improvement plan, determine how the school is progressing toward meeting those goals, and determine what they still need to do to attain the goals. They constantly review student data and discuss what adjustments they need to make to improve student learning. The principal is an integral part of the leadership team who ensures that the school improvement goals are attained and that teachers are involved in the decision making process. She achieves this by continually involving others in making decisions utilizing the problem solving techniques described in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* and *The Leader in Me*.

> Our school improvement plan is really our big rock… our leadership team is constantly trying to figure out how we can best create our school improvement plan and [utilize] our 7 Habits and our behaviors... Our leadership team is helping make decisions for the building, and helping communicate information to teachers, so the things that happen here at [the school] go through the Lighthouse Team utilizing our school improvement plan… Our people apply what they've learned, so they're constantly thinking about the students, what the data is showing about which students need more time, what we need to revisit as a staff, things like that. So they're really the team that makes a lot of decisions for our building based on school improvement data.

Some teachers take the position of technology instructional leadership, where they assist teachers with integrating technology in the classroom and improving the teaching process by sharing new ways of engaging students using technology during instruction. For instance, during

a staff meeting, teacher leaders "might share something new. Kahoot [learning games] is an example. All of technology team members are great resources if you're wanting to use technology. …So these teachers kind of share, and if you need help implementing this, [they say] 'let me know and I'll come to your room.' They do that."

By sharing leadership, the principal cultivates the leadership skills of each teacher and nurtures the development of leadership experiences. "When they have to be setting agendas and prepping up, and they're in front of everybody and they're in charge of the whole team and they are the chair of a grade level or they're part of the building leadership team where we're trying to solve problems, I think that is a great example of them zoning in on the leadership."

The principal also recognizes that empowering teachers to step up to leadership roles and build on collaborative learning contributes to building a culture of strong teacher efficacy. This encourages more open communication among teachers to share ideas and learn from each other. The principal described this as teacher-to-teacher communication that develops and nurtures self-confidence by sharing what they have learned.

> The teachers get in front of one another during staff meetings and share, "I saw this." "Can you share this?" [I] make sure that they're part of that, part of our team, so it's not just a principal doing the talking but the teachers. Teachers step out of their comfort zone sometimes and try something new, and they might find, "Ah, yeah, I want to do this and then I'm going to try this."

The principal shared an example of a teacher who provided suggestions for improvement during a big staff meeting so that others could use it. "[After the meeting], a teacher said, 'You should have put that [document] out in a Google Classroom.' She might not have had the

confidence to share it out at a larger meeting, but she decided to put the document in our Google Classroom, and people could use it or not use it."

The principal acknowledges that providing space and opportunities for teachers to build their collective and individual efficacy is necessary to build a supportive and empowering environment in which individuals are willing to collaborate toward "leading one another, and being able to make that judgment call, knowing that they have my support and trust themselves to go ahead and carry something out when it comes to helping their students." With the strong trust that encourages professional autonomy, the principal expects each teacher to reflect on the standards of professional practice in ways that align with the common language of the 7 Habits.

> Well, I really want them to make sure they're professional, because they are going to have teacher autonomy. But, if they're not being a professional and they're not adhering to what we believe with our habits then that would not necessarily be beneficial. So, when we think about teacher autonomy, of which I am all in favor, I definitely need to make sure that we've set our standards, our expectations, about what is professionalism. [We make] sure that what we share aligns with our mission. This is, I think, how we reflect professionally in terms of how we behave and how we treat one another… It's everything we do.

Adding peer observations to extend conversations for personal development. Besides setting meetings that facilitates collaboration among teachers, the principal focuses her efforts on providing more opportunities for peer observation and feedback. In addition to working with coaches, the principal always encourages teachers to visit other classrooms based on their needs. For instance, in a situation where a teacher was planning to change grades, the principal encouraged classroom visitations as a form of professional learning. "She went into another

classroom … where I know there is one of my seasoned, awesome teachers. Another teacher had commented about something she had heard about another classroom or something a teacher was working on, and I told her that teacher was trying this so go down and visit them. Then, they let me know what [the teachers] did."

The principal stated the need to provide more opportunities "to share and be comfortable with somebody coming in with another set of eyes" to enable a culture that nurtures collaborative learning with colleagues and mutual feedback through promoting a higher level of trust. The school is moving toward implementing new strategies for using peer observations applying High Impact Leadership (HIL), a program provided by a local university. This includes setting aside available funding to cover sub costs.

> Next year, we're going to have instructional rounds where teachers are going to go in with certain questions then give each other feedback. We've actually set aside some funding to cover the cost of subs and everything. So we'll see more of that next year than this year. …Teachers go in with certain questions… so they're going to visit during planning time for a short visit seven to eight minutes so they're just going to learn a little bit more about each other.

The Instructional Rounds began when people from outside the school came in and did Instructional Rounds then gave the principal and teachers feedback. This expanded during the summer when coaches and administrators met to plan informal learning walks, which would give teachers the opportunity to observe one another in classrooms using a checklist that highlighted different areas. This experience would help teachers feel comfortable having informal visits in each other's classrooms.

> We are just starting on [Instructional Rounds]. We have instructional rounds, or learning walks, but we don't use peer observations for teacher evaluation… We have a plan that we created during the summer where teachers are going to do learning walks with one another by going into rooms… They have just a really informal little checklist with a few areas, so it's not scary to teachers… I met in the summer with the curriculum director, and we just looked at some examples from other districts and schools and tried to copy what we liked to make some questions of our own.

Through the HIL program, teachers first have the opportunity to be observed by the outside people who did Instructional Rounds and gave feedback. Then, the principal will implement learning walks during this school year.

> We had other people from outside coming in to do Instructional Rounds, meaning they came and visited and gave us feedback. We've gotten feedback from them, and now we as a district are also going to implement this type of learning walk. It's really non-judgmental and just informal.

The principal views creating a safe environment as a necessary element for engaging individual teachers in both giving and receiving critical feedback as well as sharing practices with others. By observing a peer in a safe and inclusive learning environment, teachers will understand that no one is perfect in their teaching practices, and thus, everyone is in need of continuous learning and professional growth. The principal believes that these opportunities will cultivate teachers' ability to network with colleagues within a collaborative culture that values teamwork and sharing practices with one another.

> We're creating a safe place where everybody knows that we're all in different places as far as our practices that are a skill set. And so we're just trying to help all of us get better.

> I think it's helped them feel more relaxed and not feel judged. It's just how we do business and how it works… We're definitely, I think, growing in that area where we're going to have teachers feel more comfortable sharing and talking and observing… They all kind of chipped in and had that collaborative spirit to try to hit their goals. I think goal setting is a team thing, and helps teachers come together and to achieve them.

The principal realizes that seeing the success of others is a critical step to increasing a teacher's motivation to try something new and seek continued learning and growth.

> The motivation, I think, is teachers just want to get better. I feel like I have a team of teachers who hear about an idea and they're like, "Wait a minute, how did you do that?" You know, so they do get motivated because they see the results. And, they see the engagement of kids being happy about something, so they want to try it, too. So teachers seeing other teachers succeed is definitely a great motivator for teachers to try something new.

The HIL project also supports teachers implementing essential literacy practices by working with a coach to improve the literacy skills of all students. The principal explained:

> We have a coach that comes and it's all about these are essential literacy practices, and we have supports implementing them and practices we can do to achieve that…We put a lot of money into classroom libraries…for students to be more engaged in their reading and having fresh books that are interesting to them.

Feedback from the Teacher Questionnaire also supports the fact that the school is just getting started with peer observation that enhances the learning from and with each other, and teachers are looking forward to participating in observing other classrooms and having discussions with teachers. "I think this is an area that has been identified as being something the

district and school wants to happen more." The teacher acknowledged that learning by observing and sharing instructional techniques is critical to teacher professional growth. "Visiting and working with other classrooms during the day is an effective tool that teachers would like to use for professional development and collaboration." At the same time, the teacher acknowledged that, "It is one of those learning opportunities that has to be fully committed to in order to make it work." Therefore, it is an area for growth at this school.

Organizing informal activities for strengthening trusting relationships. To foster a culture of collaboration and open communications where everyone shares knowledge and gains from each other's knowledge, the principal has organized some "Sharpen the Saw" activities. During the summer, she set aside some time to meet with her teachers away from school where she did paddle-boarding with fifth-grade teachers, went on a pontoon ride with first-grade teachers, had drinks and appetizers with the fourth-grade teacher team, and played cards with second-grade teachers. Throughout these fun activities, the principal enhanced the interpersonal relationships of teachers and developed a more cohesive team by having fun times together. "Sharpening the Saw this summer, I really wanted to connect with my teams, so we got to have that culture building outside of the school doors… [where each teacher is encouraged] to just have experiences that are not always about work."

To help individual teachers feel comfortable in coming together and connecting with each other within these informal activities, the principal "tried purposely not to structure it. This was just fun… it was an activity that just brought us together for a Sunday afternoon. But I didn't structure it with like specific questions. I wanted them to feel like it was just good conversation time."

In reflecting on these valuable experiences, the principal stated:

> It was fun, especially like for paddle-boarding that one of the people had never tried it before and the other ones are like 'You can do it.' I've gotten real nice feedback that they enjoyed their time. I didn't want them to feel like they had to because it's, you know, the principal asking, but I think my experience with it was all good. It's fun.

The principal wants to build a positive school culture that keeps the school staff healthy and happy. "Well, our mission really is about lifelong learners and lifelong leaders. But this year, I really want to encourage that happy, fun, engaging school because we worked so hard in school, and it's really hard for teachers. I need to make sure we feed their hearts." With that, she supports incorporating more *Sharpen the Saw* activities during the school day.

> Really [*Sharpen the Saw*] is more this year even... Today, we have a taste test going on in that lounge. Just for fun... And they're doing something just to make it kind of a fun thing to look forward to. It might be after hours, but that could also be during the school day.

Along with these fun activities, the principal also held several back to school staff meetings that were,

> a lot more fun, I think. I tried to incorporate some motivational pieces. I opened myself up and shared a little bit more about myself, a little personal story of my history and my family, so they could be connected. So my staff feels connected, … I said, "I was just showing you that I trust you."

For instance, she kicked off the first staff meeting with Goose Chase, dressed up as a pirate with a hat and scarf when she introduced the book, *Lead Like a Pirate,* and encouraged teachers to express gratitude to each other with Skittles. The principal believes that encouraging individual teachers to *Sharpen the Saw* can help them thrive by being healthy and well balanced.

> [*Sharpen the Saw*] just kind of helps with the culture of the staff. You know they work so hard that we want to try to keep them happy [healthy and engaged]. Sometimes, we take our jobs so serious that we just have to [relax]. So, today, they brought in all kinds of nuts. When we taste tested them, we shared things that were kind of funny. It's about that culture.

Theme 2: Promotes a Growth Mindset in Teacher Practices

The principal's vision is to create a professional environment that nurtures a culture of learning not only for students but also for teachers. Besides various opportunities that stimulate working interdependently to develop the language of the 7 Habits, the principal considers developing a lifelong learning mindset as an important aspect of each teacher's professional career. She believes that with this habit in mind, teachers are constantly striving for learning and growing to improve their own practices. However, supporting continuous learning must begin with establishing a safe environment that encourages and supports making mistakes and facing challenges as valuable opportunities for learning. The principal believes that professional development will empower teachers to create a growth mindset culture where everyone feels confident in moving out of their comfort zones, encountering new experiences, and gaining new insights.

> Our mission statement really says it all -- "lifelong learners, lifelong leaders." My goal is that not just the students are thinking about learning and growing, but all of us as teachers have an open mind to learning through new experiences because we have to step up our game. And so really, my overall goals and expectations are that we come with the growth mindset that we're willing to learn new things, try new things, take risks and maybe make mistakes.

Sub-Theme A: Acts as a role model for continuous learning along the way. Since the principal expects every member in the school to continuously improve, grow, and learn, she models her own learning experiences to inspire and empower teachers in their journeys. She communicates regularly with other school leaders in the state, and stays current on the trends that are shaping education in her own community, state, and nation. She also models the importance to keep abreast of new research, knowledge, and skills to truly create a professional learning community where each teacher thrives and develops on a continuous basis.

> Definitely, …I have to stay up on reading and stay up with professional development myself. In fact, in the fall, I'm going to start my doctorate because I feel like I can be a role model to keep learning. This helps model for the staff that I cannot expect them to do something I'm not doing myself. So, modeling a growth mindset and always learning is one of the first things.

Learning more about each teacher to model differentiation. To foster a growth mindset, the principal wants students as well as teachers to feel safe and supported. She understands that each teacher has a different style of teaching as well as pace for learning, and thus, accepting differentiation in teachers is essential. "I think administrators need to differentiate for teachers just like we want our teachers to differentiate for students because we all learn at a different pace. So, I think it's important if we want our teachers to try a new piece of practice. We need to make sure it meets them where they're at."

The principal recognizes the importance of differentiating her feedback for teachers and finding the best ways to help them meet their individual professional goals and aspirations. She did a survey where she asked her teachers for their feedback about herself as an administrator. "If I know them better, then I'm going to be able to differentiate my feedback better, and I'm

going to be able to help them find their goals… You know like some of them I think are aspiring possibly to be principals. So, if that's the case, I want to help find things for them. Some of them might be really interested in the behavior piece, so I want to try to help them focus on that."

If the principal accepts differentiation in teachers, each teacher will feel comfortable in sharing with others as well as with her. Teachers are expected to create the same environment of differentiation and positive sharing with students. The principal believes that her school is a safe environment where teachers have a space to embrace taking risks and trying new approaches on a continuous basis to improve teaching practices.

> It's giving them that ability to make mistakes, trying it out. When it comes to their [teachers] professional development activities, the principal encourages teachers to make some choices based on their professional needs and preference. "…the SIPD [School Improvement Professional Development] kind of differentiates. So, some of our district professional development is already set and some is teacher choice. They get to choose 12 hours of what they want."

The district has provided professional development for all teachers, so they will build leadership skills in students. "The last three years has been six hours of *The Leader in Me*, which has lots of research behind it." At the same time, 12 out of the 35 required PD hours are chosen by the teachers. Even though the principal cannot allow teachers to use all 35 PD hours of professional development for teacher differentiation, she can help teachers understand how district professional development can support them professionally while she guides them in using the 12 hours for professional growth related to each of their own needs and wants.

While the principal wants to meet teachers where they are in their professional development, she insists that any PD activities be evidence-based. "Any of the professional

development that we do should really have research and evidence, and we're not just trying things out there." She feels that will motivate teachers to continuously evolve their teaching through using the best possible teaching strategies. For instance, in a case when teachers wanted to conduct a book study, the principal wanted to be "knowledgeable about that book and make sure that it's something that is aligned with their school improvement plan and has evidence behind it …and not just a fad. …Our district is very focused that way, so I feel like it's part of our culture." This emphasis on encouraging teachers to identify their professional needs and wants, while being mindful of student needs and the quality of the PD activity, demonstrates how the principal models reflective practices with teachers as they make choices about their professional needs and wants.

Some responses from the Teacher Questionnaire strongly aligned with encouraging teachers to continuously grow and improve by "seeking out learning opportunities… they can find to improve their teaching practices." The teacher stated, "If there are areas that have been identified as gaps in instruction, the leadership team and coaches arrange for sessions to be provided for specific teachers or all teachers." Along with this, the teacher also reported that the principal models continuous learning by encouraging teachers to participate in different learning opportunities, such as conferences or classes, "when [the principal] sees the opportunities or hears of them." The principal feels that encouraging each teacher to stay motivated in learning and growing in instructional practices will create a growth mindset culture.

Understanding that making mistakes and taking risks is essential for professional growth. To help teachers learn and grow professionally, the principal encourages them to take risks and try new ideas. For instance, a kindergarten teacher created a YouTube video with the students and used a green screen. She came up with the idea because she needed to communicate

with families, but was not comfortable with that aspect of her job. The principal encouraged the teacher to try this strategy even if it might not work. This type of encouragement fosters a growth mindset among teachers where everyone feels safe to try something new and discover new ways of learning. “My response to my teachers is usually, ‘Try it, see if it works.’ If it doesn't, that's all right… that’s a growth mindset.”

She models making mistakes and understands that mistakes are normal steps for teachers who challenge themselves and seek to continuously learn and grow. An example of modeling something new is when the principal shared an activity with teachers where she tried a new app called GooseChase. This app took teachers on a scavenger hunt where they had to find the 7 Habits trees around the building. “I told them I've never done this. I'm going to try this with you guys for the first time. …We did run into something where I didn't know the answer, but then they saw that I was modeling it [trying something new].” In this way, she modeled that it is okay to make mistakes because we do not know everything, and thus, fear of making mistakes should not stop the teachers from moving forward. This was another example of how the principal models taking risks.

The principal strongly believes that a learning environment that reinforces innovation and risk-taking encourages teachers to develop reflective practices and admit when they need help.

> If [teachers are] working in fear of losing their job, or they think that if they admit a mistake it's going to put them in jeopardy, they wouldn’t be reflective, they wouldn't want to admit being wrong, or they wouldn't admit needing to grow. So, you build a safe environment where it's OK to make mistakes. Model making mistakes and let them know that when they mess up, we just brush it off and move on. And, when we model that, we're more open to reflection because we're OK when we know we didn't do everything

right. We're constantly thinking about – "Yeah, how can I get better? Oh, yeah, I don't have to know it all. Oh, yeah, I can learn."

This principal feels that the environment has to be a safe place for making mistakes, so you take risks that may lead to professional growth and higher student achievement.

Using reflection as a way to grow. The principal describes reflective teachers as ones who have a sense of self-awareness and open-mindedness to the importance of constantly improving their teaching through developing new skills and abilities. Reflective teachers consider making autonomous decisions that enhance student learning as well as seeking new experiences, gaining new knowledge, and receiving critical feedback.

> [A reflective teacher is] one that's always kind of seeking out feedback. They're able to give you examples of the different things they've tried. Their days are filled with lots of multiple avenues and strategies because they've reflected on so many different things that they're able to try something different. They're usually open to feedback because they want to reflect more, and they want to figure out how to grow… they are seeking new learning and new ways to apply it.

However, with the increased accountability and strict educational demands that reduce or limit the ability of teachers to play a role in the process of making independent decisions over classroom activities, the principal realizes that using professional autonomy is "sometimes hard because, with the system in a district, teachers may not feel like they have as much autonomy as possible… the state has become insistent about accountability, accountability, accountability, and scores, scores, scores." According to this principal, these external factors can stifle professionalism and autonomy.

To balance state and district demands with teacher autonomy, the principal focuses on "helping teachers with pace, and not expecting too much too fast." She realizes that the pacing guides the school district provides that specify the number of days or even minutes that should be devoted to each lesson have become challenging for teachers. "It's been overwhelming for our staff at times, especially when we implement a new curriculum resource such as ReadyGEN, which is ELA." She reminds teachers that the district creates the guideline, but they are not cast in stone. Teachers should feel comfortable exercising professional judgment on what and how to teach students in ways that support their academic growth. The principal stated that, "Yes, the pacing guides are there from the district, but teacher instinct and teacher judgment are what I would like them to feel comfortable with. More than anything, I want them to know that I trust their judgment."

In order to help teachers feel comfortable in exercising their professional judgment on what and how to best teach students, the principal reminds her teachers that she trusts them as professionals and trusts their instincts and judgment. She realizes the importance of building a trusting relationship as the foundation of professional practices.

> I remind them that I trust them, and that sometimes they have to follow their teacher instinct when they are doing something with their students, and it's not quite feeling like it is in the best interests of the child, even though it's a district piece of paper or something. You have to be able to trust your judgment and maybe stop or change gears or ask some questions.

The principal feels that creating trusting relationships has helped build her own confidence, which enables her to convince district leaders that her teachers are doing excellent work and have her full support. The principal explained,

> I think my age and confidence is starting to like say, "OK, I know what's right and I need to be able to protect my teachers, sometimes more than I have in the past." That's something I shared this year. I wanted to make sure that they knew I trusted them, and I do because I've been able to be with these teachers for a while now. And, they do a great job. "If it's something that you're worried about, and you don't know if it's going to be approved, just come, and we'll talk about it, but I trust your judgment." My experience has helped me get to this point of feeling confident enough to talk to any other district level administrator who may be above me to say we're doing the right work. I think that having the years of experience has helped me be a lot more confident.

Encouraging trust and teacher empowerment for professional growth is guided by the principal's belief in the servant leader model. She aspires to be a servant leader with her primary focus on serving the needs of others, as she stated:

> I believe in servant leadership. I'm here to serve my teachers who serve the students. And that helps me guide everything and work with others in the school. I mean, I am here for them. I know a lot of times they'll say, "Oh, I don't bother you with my kids." I would rather know what's going on. … I wanted to [model support] for my staff.

As a servant leader, the principal ensures that the professional autonomy of individual teachers is supported. In this way, she empowers them to grow professionally and select the best knowledge, skills, and content to teach students. She stated:

> Teachers [grow when they] are given the support, given the autonomy, given the trust, and given a foundation that's positive and that supports them being [able to develop] a growth mindset and make mistakes. If I can serve and do all that then I feel like that's going to trickle down to helping our students.

The principal prioritizes inspiring, empowering, and motiving teachers to make their own choices that unleash their creativity and independence in the era of strict accountability. She recognizes that exercising professional autonomy is something that teachers enjoy. She learned more about this at a summer conference about a book called, *Lead Like a Pirate*. "Autonomy is a big [theme] this year… I'm trying to help teachers get more empowered because I think that was one of their areas that they were feeling like… 'Where do I get a choice?' So the book was called *Lead Like a Pirate* because sometimes pirates break the rules a little bit." By promoting the *Pirate* philosophy, the principal feels that teachers can consider embracing and espousing new powerful strategies to promote their instructional practices for better learning outcomes.

In order to share her summer learning experiences, the principal decided to do a book study with the book, *Teach Like a Pirate*. "I ordered about a dozen [copies]… and we're going to get them to the teachers who want to read it." She recognizes how sharing the messages in the book with the teachers can help them realize their autonomy in a system where external requirements can stifle their teaching. Teachers can find new ways to address student motivation and engagement in the learning process through exploring new areas of teaching and incorporating innovative techniques. "*Teach Like a Pirate* is really about engaging students and getting students excited about their learning because what we're finding in our data is the subgroup that is low continues to be our economically disadvantaged. And so we need to get those kids on fire about learning because maybe they don't come from a family household where it's all about school." By reflecting on the needs of her teachers and students, the principal continually seeks growth activities that will expand her knowledge and skills. She then uses her new learning to model for her teachers how they can reflect on and expand their strategies in meeting student needs.

Sub-Theme B: Teacher evaluation process that promotes reflective practices. To promote reflective practices, the principal holds ongoing dialogue with teachers about their practices based on what was observed and how it impacts student learning. This includes reviewing student-learning objectives (SLOs) that are set for specific learning goals in the areas of literacy and math. Analyzing evidence-based student growth helps teachers improve their instructional practices by targeting learning goals. "All student data [SLOs] is really how we start our conversations." These conversations may be informal or formal, but they begin by focusing on student academic or social behaviors, and how these behaviors reflect accomplishing the school improvement goals.

Mini-observations and ongoing follow-ups. The principal understands that classroom mini-observations are crucial in maintaining a high level of instructional practice. During these informal observations, she usually checks the lesson plans, takes some notes, comments on some practices that she observed, and asks questions that promote deep reflection on the work that has been done. The principal realizes that it is difficult to conduct one-on-one meetings with each of the 41 teachers to follow-up the mini-observations. However, by using Google Docs, she can provide each teacher with timely, immediate, and specific feedback.

> When I do mini-observations [or] walkthroughs, I always end with a question, and I'll ask them to respond to the question using Google Docs. They answer the question, then I comment back to them, so we have just a little bit of a chat. Because of my time constraints, it is not always easy to have a sit down meeting, which I know would be great, but through Google Docs, we can do a little mini-discussion. Then, there are conversations when the dialogue is back and forth between the teacher and me.

To facilitate these conversations, the principal added the SOAR technique - Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results – from High Impact Leadership HIL) to a shared Google Doc as a way to organize reflections for mini-observations. Since it is difficult to meet with each teacher personally, she believes that by using this strategic planning tool, it "gives us at least a conversation loop" that engages teachers in honest and meaningful feedback that enhances their reflective thinking. In other words, giving quality feedback encourages teachers to think and reflect upon ways to accomplish their goals. The principal starts from strengths.

> I start with the strengths that I see then some opportunities… I just try to make them think about their strengths and opportunities … that maybe I saw but they might not know. And then, the aspirations come from the teacher, like what they expected and what they think the results really were. These [aspirations and results] are for the reflection.

Starting feedback discussions about strengths, talents, and interests, "helps [individual teachers] focus on what they're good at." This has empowered some teachers for leadership positions. For example, a third grade teacher is going to be part of the Literacy Action Team K-12, "She's so great." A fifth grade teacher, "who is super excited about things now is going to be part of a building leadership team**.** Her role is not just being on the team but helping to learn how to be a facilitator. I'm trying to find their talents and make sure that I tap into them."

Conversations, either face-to-face or through Google docs, allow the principal multiple opportunities to assist each teacher in reflecting on how students are progressing and what the teacher is doing to facilitate that progress. They can also lead to leadership opportunities for teachers that go beyond the classroom.

In addition to mini-observations, the principal is working on conducting extra informal classroom visits to provide teachers with opportunities to meet her personally and informally,

instead of just on the computer or during teacher evaluation meetings. She tries to provide specific feedback that is not intimidating by using cards that offer comments to teachers to support positive, immediate feedback on their practices, instead of using the computer after visits.

> I am working on informal visits. I do a visit now with little cards, and I'm writing something, so it's not just on the computer. I'm also trying to say, "Hey, I love it. It's fun to see and hear." "I liked what you just said." "You know… the students were really having fun finding new information." So, I'm trying to make sure it's not as intimidating because it can be kind of intimidating – you are teaching and then somebody comes into the room.

Furthermore, the principal aims to do classroom visits on a friendlier basis before getting into more formal observations. For instance, she arranges with teachers to read in their classrooms in order to engage with the students and the teacher.

> I'm also making sure that at the beginning of the year, I always have teachers sign up for me to read in the classrooms. I've got to get that done. I just want to go to them. This morning, I got through the first grade before I had to get pulled away... I want to make sure I visit the second-grade classrooms yet today, so I'm just going to try to make it."

She believes that ongoing interaction with teachers in more informal ways is necessary to promote their professional growth. "[Frequent classroom visits] are a big thing…I hope to get into classrooms. I want to just do it on a friendlier basis this week because soon I'll get into more formal observations." These informal visits build trust and more honest sharing of ideas, which are important when more stressful conversations must be shared.

Evidence from the Teacher Questionnaire also showed that the principal focuses on promoting reflective thinking by teachers during the informal and mini-observations. One teacher shared that the district provides "an abundance of professional development opportunities. Many of these opportunities apply to the classroom and ways in which various subjects can be delivered more effectively," and the principal is following through. "We are asked to reflect on our teaching each time we have an evaluation walkthrough. Usually, in these situations, we are asked to reflect on specific things that were seen during the lesson." The teacher values the reflection questions that the principal asks after each visit to the classroom and acknowledges how taking time to reflect on teaching is crucial, as it encourages incorporating any professional development that was learned and discussing, "if the use of the learning was effectively implemented."

Strategies to form more difficult conversations. In some cases, after a combination of mini-observations, drop-in visits and follow-up conversations, a teacher may need more encouragement. When teachers are not committed to their roles as educators who positively affect student learning, the principal holds difficult conversations where providing honest, ongoing feedback is essential to fostering self-reflection and motivation to work harder or more efficiently to further the school mission and goals. "As a principal, one of the most important jobs is honest feedback. I must be honest in a supportive way." In a specific situation shared by the principal, a teacher was performing poorly with classroom management. The principal explained the situation:

> I actually just recently had [a reflective conversation with] a teacher… She'd been with me for a while but [her classroom management] was just not effective, and I really had to share that with her. She got emotional. It was hard because it was not happy news, and at

> times, when I start to feel really bad, I have to remind myself that this is what needs to happen. I do need to share this information with her. We have to do this for the students. I feel bad because I really care about her, but I have to make sure that honesty is my important job…So, it was OK by the end, but there were tears, and you know, she knows that next year I'm going to continue supporting her and keeping the same goals for her because she hasn't really mastered them… When I start to get, like feeling bad and maybe not wanting to have a hard conversation, I go back and say, "The kids deserve it. The kids have to have this."

The principal was trained in the Situation Behavior Impact (SBI) model to frame professional conversations with teachers in order to move them toward improved performance. This model has prepared the principal for dealing with difficult situations through planning and structuring the conversation ahead of time. This includes delivering feedback that gives teachers an opportunity to reflect on their own teaching practices and to think about what they need to change. The principal explained:

> I use SBI conversations to think about the situation, state the situation, share the behavior of what happened, and identify the impact it had. So, in these conversations, I would share the situation when I came in and that the students were doing this or that behavior. I then share what happened… When I prep these difficult conversations, I like to bring up a situation or specific example then I talk about the behavior of the person that I saw and the impact.

By using SBI, the principal feels she can hold on-going, professional conversations with teachers and "make sure that [they] don't forget the follow-up." In addition, she can assist the

teacher in understanding what they did and how it affected the students. Then, the teacher can make plans for adjusting the teaching/learning strategies to better engage students in learning.

Transition to formal evaluations to promote continuous improvement of teaching practices. Throughout the school year, the principal works to create an environment where everyone learns through professional conversations that center around observations of teaching and learning. Most of the information on student learning is shared during grade-level meetings or follow-ups to mini-observations or drop-in visits, but there is a required teacher evaluation system in the school district that is focused on Charlotte Danielson's checklist. This principal incorporates the formal requirements in a variety of ways.

The formal evaluation begins with teachers setting individual goals. At the beginning of each school year, non-tenured teachers set two professional goals, and also set data goals defining the impact on student achievement. Tenured teachers set one professional goal and two data goals related to math and reading. In addition, they identify some skills that they want to practice and improve. During beginning of the year meetings, the principal reviews the professional growth goals of teachers and discusses the areas that benefit the students. With that, the Danielson rubric is used to help teachers reflect and review from year to year. After reviewing the current goals and student data, the teachers set professional goals and data goals that support the school's Wildly Important Goals (WIGs) for reading and mathematics. The principal also conducts formal mid-year meetings with non-tenured teachers to follow up on how they are progressing in meeting their goals. These are followed by the end-of-the-year meetings to determine if goals have been met.

> So that's every year… we talk about what went well last year, what they feel that they really mastered, and if they are ready to move on to something else. We take a look at

> and figure out what areas could really benefit their students if they just mastered a goal with a little bit more style and more time. So, by using the Charlotte Danielson chart to help reflect and figure out from year to year, there is carry over… We also do mid-year meetings with teachers who are not tenured to see where they are. At the end of the year, we review goals, and determine if they really hit them [goals] or if they went above and beyond. If they made their goal, great, or if they didn't quite do it, [we know where to begin].

During the opening meeting of each school year, the principal shares a PowerPoint provided by the district office that reviews the district vision and mission as well as and school goals and programs. The principal provides the teachers time to discuss the building school improvement goals that focus on academics, leadership and culture. The WIGs are for building school improvement. The previous year, the WIGs focused on reading, and for the current year the focus will be on reading and behavior. These conversations ensure that teachers consider how the district and school goals will impact their individual goals. In this way, they are expected to look for the goals that will get the best results in improving student learning. Thus, the principal's main goal is to build ownership among teachers in working toward improving the reading or math proficiency of students, which responds to the WIGs and refers back to Habit 3 – "Put First Thing First".

> Because they all have to have a personal professional growth goal, the conversation in our building is always about raising our student data, so they [teachers] try to look for the goal that's going to give them the best bang for their buck. Our coaches help teachers with some goals. We try… to make sure they [goals] are aligned with what our big conversation is in our building. We're talking about small groups next year as one of our

goals. All teachers need to get better at differentiating in small groups. So, that could be one of their individual goals for the evaluation.

The principal takes time to encourage teachers to track their own data and figure out how to improve student learning based on the WIGs. In this way, they can be more involved in the school improvement process. She believes that modeling her learning is critical to fostering self-improvement that leads to a pathway of success in student learning.

> If I'm going to model my growth, and I'm going to take ownership on what I'm doing, I can remind them that I also have an evaluation. I have goals. And so, when I do that, I think it does help motivate teachers by giving them time to say, "Hey let's talk about our building school improvement goals. How can that affect my individual goals?" ... The WIG, Wildly Important Goal, this year was reading. We started at 53% reading proficiency in the building, which is not great. We ended up with 76% reading proficiency. So, it was our Wildly Important Goal, and we're all talking the same as we take ownership.

To help teachers focus on meeting their personal goals, the principal gives teachers the autonomy to try new ideas that should improve their practices. Along with that, she considers discussing the path that teachers choose for self-improvement as necessary to ensure that they have successfully achieved their goals in a certain area.

> If we're talking about you having independent goals and making those wildly important goals for all of us, they're going to want to be able to try new things. Again, going back to a safe environment where they [teachers] can take risks. And in the end, they know they're going to have the data to share. The principal might say, "Well, Amy, we talked about this as an area that you want to grow in." The teacher might say, 'I've tried this this

> and this.' Through the evaluation process, they will have these examples for me. They can show me what they've tried and then show me which areas they were able to achieve.

The principal believes that giving teachers the opportunity to determine key areas of improvement for meeting a goal helps them be truly engaged in selecting a path of self-improvement, which in turn, helps students take responsibility for their own learning.

> I think [teachers] are more aware when we're asking them to make goals and then figure out how they are going to meet them. …It's going to raise their responsibility because they're part of the process and this is the same thing we ask our teachers to do for their kids. The teachers are asking the kids to be more involved. The kids are responsible because they're the ones tracking their data and they start to become motivated by it.

The principal provided a specific example regarding how teachers are more responsible.

> Well, there are math goals and ELA goals and with their evaluation system, [teachers] really needed to have at least 80% of their students make a certain growth goal for math, and their ELA goal. So, with these goals, it's definitely a great example of how teachers have to track the data and show it. They are able to track their own data and then figure out how to raise it.

A teacher addressed the steps that the principal uses to engage teachers in an ongoing process of setting goals and developing a personal growth plan to attain those goals. The teacher reported that the process starts when the principal meets with teachers at the beginning of the year to "identify areas that [they] would like to improve upon within the evaluation system." With tenured teachers, the principal encourages identifying areas that teachers need to improve based on the previous year. "This way the evaluation process in many ways becomes continuous from year to year. Finding areas where growth is needed can also occur during early evaluations

and this then can be added to your growth plan if it was not identified at the beginning of the year." Within the district section of the evaluation process, the principal encourages teachers to set up Student Learning Goals for reading and math "as they are the core subject areas and will be addressed through a majority of the testing that is done."

The teacher also shared that there are mid- and end-of-year meetings to "review data pertaining to these goals… and discuss the goals and progress within the evaluation rubric." At each of the follow-up meetings, the principal encourages teachers to examine data by identifying strengths and areas that need to be addressed going forward and then make an adjustment on the goals based on changes in the data. Overall, both the principal and teacher understand the importance of using student data and numerous evaluation practices in order to improve teaching and learning.

Coaching support. During the evaluation process, the principal needs to determine different ways to support teachers to ensure that goals can be met. She recognizes that she is unable to spend enough time in classrooms evaluating the quality of teaching. A principal who is accountable for so many things can find it difficult to focus on the continuous learning and improvement that should take place in classrooms. Therefore, the principal acknowledged the importance of the coaching system that provides teachers with ongoing support for improving their instructional practices. "So, I'm really blessed to say that our coaches are doing [classroom visits] constantly and constantly giving feedback. An instructional coach helps a lot, so the teachers know what adjustments they might need to make on a goal."

Coaches regularly observe teachers in the classroom to track their progress toward attaining goals and providing quality feedback that assists teachers in making adjustments based on the data and evidence collected. Coaches help teachers meet their goals through classroom

observations and data review. They also hold regular classroom visits, focus on a teacher's goals, and review their self-assessments.

> A coach may meet with a teacher and say, "Well, I know this is your goal, and I want to help you. Like, I'll come in and observe you and give you data." A coach does that quite often here because the teacher might say, "Well, one of my goals to meet this year is in student engagement. Can you come in and do an observation?" Then, the coach will come in to give a lot of assistance. They follow this with a basic form where they can get information to the teacher and say this is the area to grow. That teacher can have that data, then they could invite the coach back in there. So, they're tracking their goal with the help of the coach… I think it's the best way to really get all of our teachers in that growth mindset.

The formal evaluation steps. The initial goal-setting begins the foundation for the formal evaluation process. To strengthen the process, the principal does numerous mini-observations, communicates through conversations in person and online, and may even suggest that a teacher use an instructional coach to work toward meeting professional and student goals. The principal keeps in mind all of the interactions she has with teachers as they move into the required evaluation process.

Pre-observation meetings. Each district requires that principals go through a formal evaluation process with each teacher. The usual process includes a pre-observation meeting to review what the teacher plans during the observation time, the observation, then a post-observation meeting where the teacher and principal discuss what occurred during the observation period, the teacher's goals, and attainment of goals.

> I don't do [formal] pre-observation meetings. I do have them share their lesson plans with me. A lot of them use electroniclessonplanbook.com, and they just share their site with me. If there's something they want to focus on. I do ask them when we meet to review their goals.

Though the principal does a formal observation in each teacher's classroom, she did not discuss what she does during that time in the classroom. The principal completes her evaluation using Danielson's checklist either during or after the observation. She uses this during the post-evaluation meeting.

Self-evaluation. After the principal does a formal evaluation, but before the post-observation evaluation meeting, the principal requests that teachers complete a self-evaluation of their practices using Danielson's rubric. This will be shared with the principal. The principal encourages them to reflect on the areas of their teaching practices, where they are growing and where they need improvement in order to identify strong and weak areas.

> Before we meet, they all do a self-evaluation using the Charlotte Danielson rubric. They have Google folders where they put all of their pieces. They're supposed to go through the domains and have different pieces of artifacts for all the components, so they have the self-evaluation completed as well as those mini-observations I talked about where I'm always asking a question. We go through the self-evaluation that they share with me before I do their evaluation.

Based on what teachers share from their self-evaluation, the principal then asks reflective questions to help the teachers think critically about their practices and determine areas of improvement. Her goal is to have self-reflection embedded in their individual practices.

> Teachers have to gather evidence. They can say, "Yeah, I'm doing all this." But, I ask, "What do you have to show me?" Then, I always ask the question, "Is this a once you did it or are you doing it all the time? Is it really part of your practice or is it just something you tried and you never did again?" Sometimes, those are kind of tougher questions. I can say, "Yes, this is a great example, but do you really feel like you're doing that, so it is embedded in your practices?"

To help teachers feel safe and comfortable sharing honest, reflective answers, the principal encourages honest conversations where she does not expect her teachers to be perfect.

> I continue to tell the teachers when we are having end-of-year evaluations that I don't want to get in an arm wrestling match over things. I just want to have an honest conversation and know that wherever you're at, that's OK. We all have room to grow. So again it goes back to making sure they feel okay not to know all the answers.

By showing teachers that making a mistake "doesn't count against them [when] they share [their self-assessment] with me… I think it helps them [improve their growth mindset]."

The principal encourages teachers to share sufficient evidence or formative assessments that represent what they are doing on a regular basis, which should also be reflected in their lesson planning. Teachers can share different types of student evidence or artifacts, such as exit tickets, white boards with student answers, a picture, or sometimes a graphic organizer. "But, they need to be kind of specific, and if they think that they're doing it on a regular basis. I need to see that in the lesson planning and things like that."

The principal holds an end-of-year meeting where she works with teachers to review self-evaluations during the evaluation process. "We go through documentation when we meet together, and then we have conversations." To enhance their reflective practices, the principal

provides teachers with the “time to just look at their scores and look at the marks that I gave them, and if they have any questions. We've talked through their goals so, if they can show me some artifacts, I may mark them up if they have sufficient evidence.”

Post-observation meeting - providing support. During the post-observation meeting, the principal usually provides suggestions for PD support that will assist teachers in strengthening their teaching practices and determine the focus area for the next year. “We do the sign-up for our coaches. Like for instance, when I met with a teacher to have a difficult conversation, I said I wanted her to continue working with her coach on specific pieces. I told her, ‘For next year, these are the two pieces you're going to create goals for again.’ It starts from there.”

In the case of that teacher who needed extra support to improve her classroom management skills, for instance, the principal did “send [her] to a workshop. I probably wanted to have her spend more time with her coach and have the coach model and mentor. I definitely think coaching is the best way because it's ongoing. It's not a one shot deal like workshops. I think coaching is fabulous.” The principal recognizes the power of the coaching system that provides teachers with ongoing support for improving their instructional practices.

The principal admits how the teacher evaluation system has become competitive, and thus, it is important to focus on continued improvement rather than getting higher scores.

> I am going on my 12th year as a principal. I'd say the last 6 or 7 years of evaluation have just been unfortunately not the part I like. I love all the stuff except evaluating teachers. As it changes, I'm starting to get a little more comfortable with the process. … I also would love the A plus, plus, but I don't know how much time is worth my efforts to explain that A plus, plus evaluation to my superintendent. I know what I do. I know what

> I do well. I know what I need to work on. I want it to be more about self-improvement and self-reflection, so I'm trying, and I share that with my teachers... I hope they can kind of take that and feel the same.

In order to keep the self-evaluation process fresh for even the tenured teachers, the principal has used different evaluation techniques. No matter what technique, the final evaluation process is difficult because teachers and administrators view it in different ways.

> This past year I tried having them do [self-evaluation on their own] and share it with me, and then I looked to see where we are off… I don't know if I know a principal that I've ever met that feels great about teacher evaluation yet… Unfortunately, the evaluation system in our state has become so competitive. I don't think it's done what we wanted.

Evaluation process extended to include paraprofessionals. With the increase in using paraprofessionals in the classroom to assist special education, English language learners, special reading and special math students, the principal's evaluation and support duties have increased.

> This year, I actually even have to support our parapros… I've never done that before. I had them do a self-evaluation because I wanted them to reflect on where they were growing and what they need to do. Basically, I gave them the same tool and said, "Please evaluate yourself and turn it in." Then, I'll be doing their evaluations, and we'll talk about the differences.

Theme 3: Involves the Whole School in the Process of Creating a Culture of Shared Leadership

The principal puts great effort into building open communication and a growth mindset that can lead everyone to the overall goal of developing *The Leader in Me*. A goal of the district is to increase student leadership through a healthy and productive school environment since each child has a unique set of skills and talents and the potential to develop into leaders. The principal

works with the school district to improve the school policies and procedures for supporting an emotionally and physically safe learning culture that empowers students to be more engaged in their learning. The school improvement plan works in concert with leadership, culture, and academic goals, "What is exciting this year… is our School Improvement matches *The Leader in Me* Framework." Teachers work on different teams where each focuses on particular goals, strategies, and activities to address each area equally. As the principal explained,

> We have three school improvement teams, and each member of our staff is either on a leadership, culture, or academic team… Teachers got to pick which team they wanted to be on… [The teams ensure that] all students at [the school] would develop leadership skills… and be proficient in all curricular areas. So, we have specific strategies for each [content area], and one is about behavior. We will improve our policies and procedures to support an emotionally and physically safe learning culture. So, these are big goals, but we want to keep them as the three big focus areas. It's our culture, it's our building of leaders, and it's our academics.

In order to engage all members of the school community in accomplishing the school goals, the principal begins by creating a strong foundation based around the 7 Habits that lead to sharing the understanding of the work. She regularly communicates the school's expectations during staff meetings and daily communication, which enables everyone to share a common language with one another and work toward meeting them.

> We do this through our staff meetings, and… our weekly communications. We start during our very first staff meeting when my school improvement chair … is in charge… and she helps… create how we want the language to be, and then we communicate it to the staff.

By modeling the 7 Habits, teachers learn about how to teach successful habits and help student become leaders. The principal wants to develop a nurturing, safe and challenging learning environment where teachers are encouraged to work independently and interdependently to develop student voices. In order to move everyone forward by implementing *The Leader in Me,* the principal develops a culture of shared leadership that influences teachers and involves students.

Sub-theme A: Establishing and reinforcing core expectations. The principal supports sharing a common language for building the core expectations of the 7 Habits by providing all staff members with ongoing professional training. This training allows teachers to discuss and model the 7 Habits then transfer their new knowledge to students through integrating the 7 Habits into classroom discussions. To ensure that all staff members know and apply the 7 Habits, new staff members are encouraged to sign up for a day of training on the 7 Habits Signature 4.0. "When we talk about our common language of 7 Habits, we already have the new teachers signed up for a training in November to make sure they've been trained in the 7 Habits."

The principal also establishes and reinforces core expectations by making time for all school staff to have a one-day summer training by the Franklin Covey organization on the 7 Habits. The training focuses on planning how to integrate these habits into the school in order to build a common vision, as well as clear expectations that should be known and understood by the principal, teachers and students.

> On June 14th, the very first day after kids were out, we had a full staff training all day with Franklin Covey, and it focused on creating that community feeling of wrapping around what our big outcomes are, and what we want to do. What is the vision of our

> school and what do we want? And we're talking more about having that happy fun engaging school that makes it happy to come in... So, it's all related.

Introducing goals and language to all students. The principal devoted the first week of the school year to establishing clear expectations using the common language of the 7 Habits that would engage both teachers and students in collaboratively creating the school culture. "We really kicked off [the school year]. Like I said, the last two days were big about making sure all the expectations and common language were understood." This includes holding two big assemblies that highlighted the importance of increasing the sense of responsibility and accountability of each student to meet the new vision of the outcomes by decreasing discipline referrals.

> When last year ended, it was really stressful because of some student behaviors and trying to meet their needs. So [this year], we're just trying to help our teachers know a little bit more about social-emotional learning. We started off this year with two big assemblies talking about expectations, and making sure all the kids understood them. We have a big goal of reducing the office referrals, which are the disciplinary actions.

To help teachers become fully engaged in promoting social and emotional learning for students, the principal supports time with the school psychologist who assists staff in understanding students and trauma. This can help teachers reduce the negative impact of trauma related to students' learning and life experiences.

> We also have our school psychologist presenting to our staff about students and trauma. So it's going to be a big focus on learning about how our kids have dealt with trauma or have experienced trauma. [This will include] some symptoms to look for and how best to

handle it. So, we're really kind of making that an important part of our focus because it seems like the number of students dealing with things is increasing.

During the first week, the principal also set clear expectations for in every classroom, in the hallways, and in the cafeteria by displaying posters that present the common language. By reinforcing the language into everyday school experiences, the principal believes that will encourage students to think critically how to practice social and emotional learning through a leadership lens.

The last two days were big about making sure all the expectations and common language were started off, and we have posters being made. We just went over that with our kids and staff about what the hallway language looks like, how you're going to use this habit in the cafeteria, and how growing our Student Lighthouse Team, which is our student leadership team, is going to be a continued focus making sure that they help us, and come up with more ideas on how to make sure kids understand the language.

Ongoing communication using student leaders. To ensure that students understand the language, the principal recognizes the need to review 7 Habits from time to time by involving older students to lead Habit Assemblies to explain how to use habits to prevent any discipline issues that might occur later.

In fact, I had the kids yesterday talk about Habits 1, 2, and 3. The fifth graders shared out in front of the Assembly how they use it. So that's going to be continued. I think it's important that we do school-wide assemblies again to review language certain times of the year. We really do need to bring them back where it's not just done now and then, but we making sure we keep bringing it back.

After communicating the common language to all students, the principal encourages

teaching students those expectations through modeling them throughout the school year. In collaboration with the BLT, the principal developed the whole school calendar based on the Habits, where "teachers spend the first month talking about all the 7 Habits, and then we get into Habit 1. We have a whole calendar of Habits, and what we're going to do each month for those Habits."

Extending student leadership to family involvement. To involve parents and families in the leadership model, the principal also encourages educating them about the 7 Habits to engage families in new ways of thinking and new attitudes that bring a positive impact to their students. Several teachers have been trained to facilitate and lead the activity with allowing others to take turns.

> We're going to be teaching our families the 7 Habits this year starting in October, and we are excited about that. We have materials to actually give them and books and beautiful pieces with videos and all that. We are actually going to involve two of our teachers plus a family member. The three of them were trained last year to bring these Habits to families… We're going to have family nights where we're hoping 10 families will come and participate… We will start with Habit 1 in October and… November Habit 2. Different people will take turns facilitate leading these.

Sub-theme B: Expanding the language for academic success. Instructional coaches from the school district are assigned to work with teachers each month. Therefore, the principal ensures that the training the support staff on The 7 Habits and *The Leader in Me* is up-to-date. However, the use of a common language goes beyond the 7 Habits. For instance, the principal ensures that every new teacher receives training in English Language Arts and Common Core Math. After three years of training, the school is currently moving toward aligning academics

and using small group instruction for Eureka math. By building a common language for new academic programs, the principal believes it assists in properly promoting each program to best meet the academic needs of students.

> We've done training in the areas of English Language Arts… We have instructional coaches in our district. As a district, we give a lot of support to our classroom teachers. We will be doing more next year with our math focusing on small group instruction through the coaching system we have here. I think that really helps because teachers don't feel like they just learn it, and we say goodbye. We continue to revisit it. It's not just a workshop and then we're done. It's constant revisiting.

Sub-theme C: Encourages instructors to empower students. The principal believes in promoting *The Leader in Me* model and creating a culture of shared leadership, so teachers are inspired to consider their own practices that lead to student empowerment. This includes encouraging students to take leadership roles that inspire them to accept personal responsibility for their academic learning and goal achievement. By giving students more voice and more choice, teachers have become more motivated to find new ways of empowering students.

> I definitely think with our *Leader in Me* and 7 Habits training, teachers have let go of some of the things they were always doing by letting the students do it. They're letting students have leadership roles or letting students do goal setting. Students are tracking their own progress. This made a big impact on how things are being done when it comes to student empowerment. Teachers are finding ways that I don't think they ever realized that they could give up to kids. Now they have to ask themselves, "Wait a minute, what am I doing that a student can be doing?" So it's definitely having a big impact on their practices.

The principal always encourages teachers to explore new ideas. In one case, she suggested to a fifth-grade teacher to try a Socratic seminar as a way to share some of her instructional load with students by encouraging each one to track their own progress and data.

> During the end of year teacher evaluation, …we talked about teachers giving things up and more students taking the lead on asking higher order questions. She tried [Socratic seminar], and then I asked her to share it with other people, so it had the ripple effect. The Socratic seminar was a great example of a teacher giving up some of her instructional piece to the students and empowering the students to take responsibility for their own learning that leads to their ownership… which helps our scores.

The principal shared a resource called "Seesaw" to emphasize how students are taking ownership of their own learning. They are encouraged to communicate their learning with their families, provide them updates, and share their work not only with their parents, but also with the teacher and principal.

> So last year I talked with several staff members about family engagement, and they were like, "Well, I can do it like I do other websites." I show them our rubric for the Charlotte Danielson performance assessment, and I show them the framework of really highly effective teachers and that the next real goal is students doing the sharing. And this year, I have more than five teachers who are trying that resource called Seesaw. And now students are communicating with families. They're giving the updates on their learning, and it's been really great to watch it kind of spread like wildfire.

Principal Case Description Summaries

Principal One

Principal One has used several powerful strategies that have transformed her school culture. By reviewing the previous culture of her school, which she called "toxic", and by listening to the general concerns and feelings of individual teachers, this principal began to create a positive school culture that promotes learning and engagement for everyone. She created new, positive approaches that engage all teachers in rich and sustaining conversations about learning opportunities. By putting the needs of teachers ahead of her own, this principal is continually looking to improve the professional practices of teachers, which can grow through learning, persistence and hard work. She believes, models, and promotes the power of a growth mindset to empower teachers to transform teaching and learning.

Within this professional community, the principal encourages teachers to assume leadership roles and responsibilities as school leaders. She does not let her position as a school leader allow her to think that she knows more than those she leads. By recognizing her limitations and then listening to students and teachers, the principal has built mutual trust. Doing this has also given her the power to transform the school culture toward admitting mistakes and learning from them. She not only demonstrates her own desire to grow professionally, but she also articulates clear values and principles then follows them in word and deed in order to create a professional learning community where teachers are inspired to collectively guide each other toward a common purpose and professional growth.

Case One discussed four major themes along with sub-themes and elements that emerged in the analysis of principal one's data. Table 3 offers a summary of the principal interview key findings along with how they align with the teacher questionnaires and documents. The principal

provided one or more documents that supported the information shared during principal interviews and in the teacher questionnaires. Table 3 reviews the themes, sub-themes and elements, and indicates which source of data supports each. Note that the themes emerging from this case were expressed by the principal and supported by two or more teachers, and sometimes supported by documentation.

Table 3
Summary of Case One Findings

Major Themes/Sub-Themes and Elements	Principal Interviews	Teacher Questionnaire	Documents
Theme 1: Promotes a Growth Mindset And Continuous Professional Development as The Foundation of The School Culture	X		
Sub-theme 1-A: Encouraging teachers to use the teaching and learning cycle to consider new ways of teaching	X	X	
Element a. Using constant conversations with the teachers	X	X	
Element b. Using constant conversation with peers	X	X	
Element c. Encouraging teachers to see themselves as learners	X	X	
Element d. Creating a space for new ideas	X	X	
Sub-theme 1-B: Providing continuous support that facilitates teachers' professional growth	X	X	
Element a. Challenging teachers to lead learning activities	X	X	
Element b. Providing ongoing support through professional development	X	X	
Element c. Providing choices for professional development activities	X	X	
Sub-theme 1-C: Supporting changes to create a positive learning environment	X		
Theme 2: Uses the Teacher Evaluation System to Promote Professional Learning and Growth	X	X	X
Sub-theme 2-A: Previous learning walks and conversations influence the formal evaluation process	X	X	X
Element a. Fostering meaningful growth around targeted areas	X	X	X

Table 3 – Continued

Major Themes/Sub-Themes and Elements	Principal Interviews	Teacher Questionnaire	Documents
Element b. Identifying the focus of the observations	X	X	X
Element c. Follow-up to observations	X	X	X
Sub-theme 2-B: Stimulating reflective thinking and positive actions through ongoing conversation	X	X	X
Element a. Providing teachers with relevant data on their instruction and encourages using formative assessment of student learning	X	X	X
Element b. Engaging teachers in coaching conversations	X		
Theme 3: Focuses the School Culture on Supporting Teacher Collaboration and Promoting the Philosophy of Vulnerability, Honesty, and Humility to Acknowledge the Need for Continuous Learning and Growth	X		
Sub-theme 3-A: Encouraging substantive Conversation	X	X	
Sub-theme 3-B: Facilitating peer observation	X	X	
Element a. Promoting a growth mindset through peer observation	X	X	
Element b. Reducing negative conversations	X	X	
Element c. Developing open communication	X	X	
Element d. Supporting peer observation as a safe model of learning	X	X	
Sub-theme 3-C: Modeling the philosophy of humility and vulnerability that inspires a learning community	X	X	
Theme 4: Recognizes the Importance of Sharing Leadership with Teachers and Supporting their Professional Autonomy, which Empowers Them to Grow as a Leader	X	X	
Sub-theme 4-A: Recognizing the importance of sharing the workload	X	X	
Sub-theme 4-B: Building a trust that empower teacher for leadership	X	X	

Principal Two

Principal Two stressed that his first goal was to challenge teachers to employ differentiated instruction to meet the needs of all students. In order to accomplish this goal, he found professional learning opportunities that could help teachers to adopt the language and values of differentiated instruction. Using the techniques of continuous conversations that were first informal with the staff or teams of teachers or one-on-one, he built a professional learning community that engaged teachers in collaborating to improve instruction and expanded the school's network to include the community in assisting with meeting goals to improve academic achievement. Through this process of communication and collaboration, the principal was able to encourage teacher leaders who were willing and able to take on different activities that would involve everyone and improve instruction and learning opportunities for all students.

He recognizes the importance of making time to build a more collaborative team, one that focuses on sharing thoughts and providing the support that helps individual teachers consider their own practices, and the principal ensures changes and improvement in teaching that make a meaningful difference for every student. He has been able to facilitate opportunities to build and sustain a professional community where teachers are more productive, more engaged, and more interdependent. The principal also recognizes that the diverse student body's needs require different ways of teaching and learning. To meet these challenges, the principal focuses on being visible in his school and community, building trusting relationships, creating a sense of transparency and developing a shared purpose with the entire school family.

Case Two discussed four major themes along with sub-themes and elements that emerged in the analysis of principal two's data. Table 4 offers a summary of the principal interview key findings along with how they align with the teacher questionnaires and documents. The principal

provided one or more documents that supported the information shared during principal interviews and in the teacher questionnaires. Table 4 reviews the themes, sub-themes and elements, and indicates which source of data supports each. Note that the themes emerging from this case were expressed by the principal and supported by two or more teachers, and sometimes supported by documentation.

Table 4
Summary of Case Two Findings

Major Themes/Sub-Themes and Elements	Principal Interviews	Teacher Questionnaire	Documents
Theme 1: Promotes Success for All Students by Encouraging Differentiated Instruction in All Classrooms	X		
Sub-theme 1-A: Focuses on meeting student needs	X		X
Element a. Establishing the use of data	X	X	X
Element b. Making time to examine data	X	X	X
Element c. Determining interventions to better meet student needs	X		
Sub-theme 1-B: Promoting a common language and understanding	X		
Element a. Scheduling grade level meeting	X	X	X
Element b. Planning professional development for all teachers	X	X	
Element c. Extending PD activities	X	X	
Element d. Specialized training	X		
Theme 2: Uses Continuous Conversation and Observations so that Teachers have a Regular Process of Reflection and Improvement	X		
Sub-theme 2-A: Building open, informal conversations	X	X	
Element a. Walk-throughs	X		
Element b. Feedback conversations	X		
Element c. Reflective conversations	X		
Sub-theme 2-B: Individual conversations that lead to formal evaluation	X	X	X

Table 4 – Continued

Major Themes/Sub-Themes and Elements	Principal Interviews	Teacher Questionnaire	Documents
Element a. Goal- setting	X	X	X
Element b. Growth plans	X	X	X
Element c. Ongoing follow-up	X	X	X
Element d. Formal observation	X	X	X
Element e. Self-evaluation and reflection	X		X
Element f. Special support	X		X
Theme 3: Engaging Teachers in a Teamwork Environment that Fosters a Solid Network for Collaborative Learning and Development	X		
Sub-theme 3-A: Builds on formal conversations between teams	X	X	X
Element a. Facilitates the opportunities to work in teams	X	X	
Element b. Schedules collaborative time that supports continuous reflection	X	X	
Element c. Implements peer teacher observation	X		
Sub-theme 3-B: Developing a community collaboration and engagement	X		X
Theme 4: Cultivates Leadership in Teachers to Increase Confidence in their Abilities and Responsibilities	X		
Sub-theme 4-A: Empowers teachers to assume various leadership roles	X	X	
Sub-theme 4-B: Trusts teachers to organize different school activities	X	X	

Principal Three

With a vision of developing leaders, Principal Three has created a school culture focused on open conversation around the 7 Habits, promoting a shared vision and common goals for all. She emphasizes open communication among teachers that is grounded in giving trust and grace in order to facilitate opportunities for collaborative learning and sharing best practices. More open communication about successes and mistakes, more trusting relationships, and more learning from colleagues are all essential in elevating the classroom practices of individual

teachers. She encourages teachers to collaborate to determine student needs and how best to meet them by placing teachers in leadership positions like leading improvement teams and by meeting teachers away from school to bond through participation in fun activities.

The principal understands that developing a collaborative school culture depends on promoting a growth mindset for teachers. Because she expects teachers to focus on continuous learning and professional growth, she pushes herself to grow and be a role model for professional development through continuous learning. She began this process by opening herself to the school staff because she wants not only to be a leader but also a role model who uses specific programs that build a common language for developing a safe learning environment for all teachers and students. By focusing on building a learning mindset with teachers, the principal has been able to share district and school goals with all of the teaching staff and engage them in a goal-setting process that will improve their teaching in order to raise academic achievement for all students.

Leadership and learning are essential factors in creating a culture of best teaching practices. The principal relies on building trust, so teachers are not afraid to try new strategies and do self-evaluations that can lead to in-depth conversations. By creating a supportive, safe environment, she ensures continuous learning and development that empowers teachers to become leaders who cultivate leadership skills that they will transfer to their students.

Case Three discussed three major themes along with sub-themes and elements that emerged in the analysis of Principal Three's data. Table 5 offers a summary of the principal interview key findings along with how they align with the teacher questionnaire and documents. The principal provided one or more documents that supported the information shared during principal interviews and in the teacher questionnaire. Table 5 reviews the themes, sub-themes

and elements, and indicates which source of data supports each. Note that the themes emerging from this case were expressed by the principal and supported by a teacher, and sometimes supported by documentation.

Table 5
Summary of Case Three Findings

Major Themes/Sub-Themes and Elements	Principal Interviews	Teacher Questionnaire	Documents
Theme 1: Supports a Collaborative Culture that Serves as a Building Block	X		
Sub-theme 1-A: Incorporating school-wide leadership habits into the culture of the school community	X	X	
Element a. Setting regular staff and grade level meetings	X	X	
Element b. Setting staff meetings to support school-wide leadership habits as a base for addressing problems	X		
Element c. Models and incorporates support school-wide leadership habits	X		X
Sub-theme 1-B: Encouraging open communications that build trust	X	X	X
Element a. Expanding collaborative learning	X	X	
Element b. Sharing responsibilities of leadership with teachers	X	X	
Element c. Adding peer observations to extend conversations for personal development	X	X	X
Element d. Organizing informal activities for strengthening trusting relationships	X		
Theme 2: Promotes a Growth Mindset in Teacher Practices	X	X	
Sub-theme 2-A: Acts as a role model for continuous learning along the way	X	X	
Element a. Learning more about each teacher to model differentiation	X	X	
Element b. Understanding that making mistakes and taking risks is essential for professional growth	X		
Element c. Using reflection as a way to grow	X	X	

Table 5 – Continued

Major Themes/Sub-Themes and Elements	Principal Interviews	Teacher Questionnaire	Documents
Sub-theme 2-B: Teacher evaluation process that promotes reflective practices	X	X	X
Element a. Mini observations and ongoing follow-up	X	X	X
Element b. Strategies to form more difficult conversations	X		
Element c. Transition to formal evaluations to promote continuous improvement of teaching practices	X	X	X
Element d. Coaching support	X	X	X
Element e. The formal evaluation Steps	X		X
Theme 3: Involves the Whole School in the Process of Creating Culture of Shared Leadership	X	X	X
Sub-theme 3-A: Establishing and reinforcing core expectations	X	X	X
Element a. Introducing goals and language to all students	X	X	X
Element b. Ongoing communication using student leaders	X	X	X
Element c. Extending student leadership to family involvement	X	X	X
Sub-theme 3-B: Expanding the language for academic success	X		X
Sub-theme 3-C: Encourages instructors to empower students	X		X

Cross-Case Analysis

The purpose of the interviews with these three principals was to discuss the strategies they use to create a collaborative school culture that supports the professional development of all teachers in ways that increase (a) reflective practices, (b) self-assessment, (c) self-direction, and (d) motivation for continuous learning. After transcribing and reviewing these three conversations, I identified five major themes that each principal has employed to develop and sustain a collaborative culture, where each theme flows into the next one. All three principals began by using professional conversations that were positive and supportive for teachers to set

the norms for daily interaction and ongoing communication. This communication became essential in building a culture of collaboration. After modeling and setting norms for conversation, each principal and their staff members found that they could discuss openly to collaborate in advancing student achievement. This led to continuous learning for all staff members as they explored and identified better teaching strategies that improved student learning. As staff members learned to reflect on their teaching and explore ways to improve, the principals encouraged and guided staff members into taking leadership roles at different levels within and beyond the school. As the principal and staff became more comfortable with seeking ways to assist all students and in taking different roles in the learning process, they expanded the continuous learning culture to students, parents and the larger community so all stakeholders felt empowered and ready to meet the achievement needs of students. Although each principal employs a discrete leadership style, they all know that in order to provide the best learning environment for students, they needed to develop a collaborative learning environment for everyone.

Theme 1: Multiple Levels of Conversations

Speaking with the three principals revealed that conversations are essential to creating a culture for overall teacher development and student success. In different ways, each principal expressed the importance of starting and modeling conversations that lay the groundwork for both formal and informal discussions. At the heart of these ongoing conversations was the conviction that frequent communication and fruitful interaction around teaching and learning in a supportive learning environment are central components of teachers' professional growth. Table 6 illustrates how all three principals use a combination of informal, formal, and substantive conversations.

Table 6
Cross-Case Summary of Theme One: Multiple Levels of Conversations

Overarching Themes	Collective Sub-Themes	Elements	Case One	Case Two	Case Three
1. Multiple Levels of Conversations			X	X	X
	1-A. Formal conversations		X	X	X
		1A-1. Staff and grade level meetings	X	X	X
		1A-2. Initial goal setting	X	X	X
		1A-3. Frequent observations and conversations with the principal or a coach	X	X	X
	1-B. Informal conversations		X	X	X
		1B-1. Frequent visits, and formative, ongoing feedback	X	X	
		1B-2. Open classroom doors to share practices	X	X	X
		1B-3. Informal activities for open communication	X	X	X
	1-C. Substantive conversations		X	X	X
		1C-1. Build a trust that fosters a safe culture of collaboration and open communication	X	X	X
		1C-2. Grade level meetings	X	X	X
		1C-3. Cross-grade-level teams		X	
		1C-4. District-wide grade level meetings	X		

The formal part of conversations often begins during staff meetings and extends into grade level meetings. During these scheduled interactions, the rules and norms of open communication are set and the encouraging of sharing ideas and opinions is begun. With school-wide vision and goals in mind, individual teachers begin to practice reflection with initial goal setting that focuses around student data or school vision and their own achievements.

Goal setting usually occurs at the beginning of the school year when the principals review data and set clear goals to establish a shared language around instructional improvement. This

starts the building of a sense of ownership among teachers as they clearly review the purpose of their collective work. Then the principals follow the goal setting by determining the achievement of goals for both teachers and students. The ongoing review of these goals is embedded after frequent observations that are usually followed by conversations with the principal or a coach to discuss specific techniques of instructional improvement. These initial formal conversations during scheduled meetings and goal setting become more informal with frequency, and when more formative, ongoing feedback is used to facilitate the professional growth of each individual teacher. The formal and informal conversations build a common vocabulary that is used daily and builds trust. While Principals One and Two are more informal in the way that they communicate and discuss teaching practices by building professional conversations with teachers about instruction and working closely with students, Principal Three struggles to do this. She is far more formal with set programs like *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* and *The Leader in Me*. However, all of the three principals are committed to professional conversations.

Opportunities for frequent, formative, formal and informal conversations about the teaching process extend to peer-to-peer communication. All three principals encourage teachers to share their practices and open classroom doors to engage with others in deeper more authentic conversations about teaching and learning. To cultivate the teachers' abilities to network with colleagues, the principals also have organized informal activities for open communication and take the time to connect on a personal level, whether during or outside the school day.

As the principals facilitate moving these conversations from formal to informal, whether the conversations are during grade level meetings, around lunch tables, after peer visits, or after learning walks, they build a strong sense of trust for learning from and with each other to deepen their own practices. A climate of trust has helped to establish a safe environment for sharing

expertise and learning from each other's experiences. Teachers have become more open and flexible by gaining different perspectives of teaching and exploring models that encourage more opportunities for professional growth.

Throughout all these conversations, in both formal and informal settings, teachers are encouraged to share substantive conversations that can make a difference for teaching and learning. Even though these principals did not refer to these interactions as substantive conversations, they all have created a space where teachers can speak candidly with their peers, share ideas, and reflect on their own practices without feeling threatened or judged.

In addition to grade-level meetings, Principal Two has created two cross-grade-level teams that consist of kindergarten through second grade and third through fifth grade. These meetings give teachers insights into what other teachers are doing with students before they reach a certain grade, and of what teachers from the next grade up are expecting students to be able to do before reaching that grade. Teachers are therefore able to plan for student success in a more comprehensive manner.

Principal One extended these conversations during district-wide grade level meetings to substantively engage teachers in discussions that would encourage sharing ideas and support risk-taking. During interviews, it became apparent that all of the principals understood that in order to foster a safe culture of collaboration and open communication, trust must be built. Once trust that encouraged substantive conversation was established, the conversations became more meaningful, which encouraged creating a meaningful learning environment that was more reflective and engaged everyone in digging deeper into best teaching practices, so students could reach higher levels of achievement. Each principal recognized that in order to build a collaborative school culture that supports the professional development of all teachers,

conversations must be open, honest and safe if true communication or understanding is to be achieved, so everyone focuses on student success. This strategy has led to a more collaborative and positive spirit among teachers.

Theme 2: Teacher Collaboration

Open communication is further developed during collaboration that begins with more formal conversations to share student data, common goals or visions, and student interventions. Table 7 reveals that teacher collaboration and communication is primarily focused on student learning. Teachers are encouraged to meet on a regular basis during staff, school grade level, and district grade-level meetings to examine student data, and then discuss teaching strategies and the practices that would best meet student needs. By working in teams, these principals ensure that they not only are establishing a strong common language or common vision for talking about teaching and learning, but are also promoting a cohesive learning community that nurtures a culture of self-reflection. Principal Two found that in order to develop a collaborative community, it was necessary to adjust the school schedules to provide a common planning time that allows more opportunities for collegial conversations about instruction. By actively engaging teachers in an environment that supports reflection, the principals have set the stage for continuous improvement.

Table 7
Cross-Case Summary of Theme Two: Teacher Collaboration

Overarching Themes	Collective Sub-Themes	Elements	Case One	Case Two	Case Three
2. Teacher Collaboration			X	X	X
	2-A. Communication around student learning		X	X	X
		2A-1. Set regular staff, school grade level, and district grade-level meetings	X	X	X
		2A-2. Provide a common planning time		X	

Table 7–Continued

Overarching Themes	Collective Sub-Themes	Elements	Case One	Case Two	Case Three
	2-B. Peer-to-peer observations followed by reflective conversations		X	X	X
		2B-1. Provide a safe and inclusive learning atmosphere	X	X	X
		2B-2. Challenge struggling teachers to observe more experienced peers	X		
		2B-2. Incorporate the HIL (High Impact Leadership) program		X	X

Stimulating collaborative efforts among teachers also involve encouraging and listening to feedback from colleagues. The principals focus great attention on giving teachers more opportunities to learn from one another through peer-to-peer observations followed by reflective conversations. To help teachers feel comfortable with this form of collaborative professional development, each of the principals provide a safe and inclusive learning atmosphere where teachers can observe a peer during the self-evaluation process and not just during the final formal evaluation process. Principal One encourages her teachers by challenging the ones who were struggling to observe more experienced peers. Principals Two and Three increase opportunities for peer observation by incorporating the HIL (High Impact Leadership) program, where substitute teachers, funded by the grant, cover classrooms while classroom teachers are observing other classes. Thus, providing time for observations and reflection.

All principals understand that as teachers collaborate, they all learn together and build a professional learning community that makes teacher learning a priority. Opportunities for open, ongoing, and informal communication fosters establishing strong collegial relationships as well as a sense of shared responsibility that support a culture of continuous learning and constant

improvement. In this way, the principals ensure ongoing and substantive improvement of instruction that can better meet the learning needs of all students.

Theme 3: Continuous Learning

Using elements of the formal evaluation systems on a regular basis has become central to supporting teachers in developing their professional habits and in motivating continuous learning, reflection, and refining teaching practices. Principals One and Three often spoke of professional habits that would encourage a growth mindset, but Principal Two talked about teachers as continuous learners. However, whether principals called teacher conversations and collaboration *continuous learning* or a *growth mindset*, these interactions between teachers are intended to foster their professional habits.

One way that the principals develop these professional habits is by examining student growth, discussing teaching strategies, and identifying areas where improvement is needed. This requires each teacher setting professional goals as the foundation of the formal evaluation process. (See Table 8.) All principals indicated that discussions prior to goal setting are necessary to further develop self-reflection and reinforce a culture of continuous learning.

Table 8
Cross-Case Summary of Theme Three: Continuous Learning

Overarching Themes	Collective Sub-Themes	Elements	Case One	Case Two	Case Three
3. Continuous Learning			X	X	X
	3-A. Developing Professional Habits		X	X	X
		3A-1. Examine student growth, discuss teaching strategies, and identify areas where improvement is needed	X	X	X
		3A-2. Goal setting for formal evaluation	X	X	X
		3A-3. Continuous support for setting and reaching goals	X	X	X

Table 8 – Continued

Overarching Themes	Collective Sub-Themes	Elements	Case One	Case Two	Case Three
	3-B. Participating in Professional Development Activities		X	X	X
		3B-1. Required by the district or school	X	X	X
		3B-2. Provide additional-ongoing support	X	X	X
		3B-3. Create a mentor/ coaching program	X	X	X
		3B-4. Offer a variety of learning opportunities that addressed each teacher's individual needs	X	X	
		3B-5. Center professional development activities around the district's program			X
		3B-6. Identify personal wants and needs	X	X	X
	3-C. Model lifelong learning		X	X	X
		3C-1. Shared own journey	X	X	X
		3C-2. Sharing literature or research	X	X	X
		3C-3. Participate with teachers in PD activities	X	X	X
	3-D. Safe environment for risk taking		X	X	X
		3D-1. Share or express new ideas and participate in professional decisions	X	X	X
		3D-2. Model vulnerability, humility, and the making of mistakes	X		X

The principals have incorporated different techniques for promoting continuous support for setting and reaching goals. These techniques go beyond a one-time shot, as all three principals indicated that a continuous process is the key to achieving professional growth. The process includes maintaining frequent observations and professional conversations that stimulate more formative, ongoing feedback by continually reflecting upon and improving teaching practices.

Feedback and reflection encourage teachers to react positively to feedback since it is focused on student needs, and not on teacher deficits. To deal with the challenges of the evaluation process, the principals realize that, if they build a system of support and participate in conversations on a regular basis, teachers will not worry as much about getting higher evaluation scores. Instead, they will focus on their own ongoing growth in meeting student needs and thoughtfully move toward incorporating continuous learning as an integral part of their professional practices. This process provides ongoing support during grade level meetings, and with mentors, peer coaching, district coaches, and follow-up after class visits. These strategies are used constantly throughout the school year and have led to more self-reflection and better teacher evaluations.

Instead of relying on a single observer to evaluate all teachers, the principals' support includes instructional coaches who provide opportunities for more frequent, formative conversations with teachers about their instructional practices and student successes. In addition to receiving support from coaches, teachers are encouraged to work with their peers and use reflective conversation to offer valuable insights for deepening their practices.

One way to support continuous learning is through professional development (PD). All principals talked about different areas of professional development activities including some that are required by the district or the school. Along with these basic activities, the principals provide teachers with additional-ongoing support through encouraging PD based on the specific needs of each teacher. Principal One undertook the responsibility of creating a peer-coaching program instead of relying on what was provided by the district. She provided extra training to experienced teachers, so they could coach others. She then increased opportunities for professional dialogue between teachers to inspire meaningful feedback and to take steps toward

self-improvement. Throughout the coaching process, this principal indicated her respect for teachers by encouraging individual choices based on their specific needs and interests.

Principal Two also supports extending PD activities by offering a variety of learning opportunities that address each teacher's individual needs. In addition, instructional coaching that provides constructive feedback in an informal manner played a key role in supporting the improvement of teaching practices. Principal Three centered professional development activities around the district's program of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* and *The Leader in Me*. In addition to the district's training modules, the principal encouraged the teachers to identify evidence-based activities that would assist in achieving personal and student goals.

All three principals want teachers to go beyond the required PD by reflecting on personal achievements and identifying personal wants and needs. This develops teacher professional autonomy through self-reflection. The principals instill a desire to learn what is necessary for each teacher to help the school reach its goals. By integrating a blended approach to teacher professional development that works to meet the learning styles of individual teachers and the needs of students, the principals ensure a comprehensive system focused on the professional growth of teachers, so professional learning is purposeful and ongoing.

In order to encourage teachers to learn how to continuously develop their professional habits, the principals model lifelong learning. They actively coach teachers and model behaviors and activities that improve teaching and learning. This often occurred when a principal would share his/her own experiences, either as a teacher or principal, that would develop his/her own professional habits. Because they focus on the quality of instruction, they emphasize research-based strategies by sharing literature or research that promotes new knowledge, and then encourage teachers to apply the new knowledge in their classrooms. Principal Three based her

coaching process on the *Leader in Me* and *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, which both emphasize the value of research-based teaching strategies and evidence-based practices. To further emphasize continuous learning, principals also participate with teachers in PD activities and attend conferences with their staffs. By modeling a love of learning, these principles provide continuous support that helps teachers in their quest to build professional habits.

During professional growth activities, all three principals fostered a safe environment for risk taking that motivates teachers to share or express new ideas and participate in professional decisions without feeling hesitation or worrying about making mistakes. Especially with Principals One and Three, when they began to model vulnerability, humility, and making of mistakes, they created a space where taking risks was highly encouraged. Because they are more open to change, to facing new challenges, and are honest about their strengths, weaknesses, and mistakes, teachers now understand that it is okay to take risks, fail at times, and to be imperfect. This developed a greater level of trust in the school environment where teachers feel comfortable enough to try new ideas and seek support from others to enrich their continuous learning and growth. As they embrace vulnerability as part of their leadership styles, they create greater clarity and a deeper and more meaningful spiritual experience for their learning communities. This professional environment facilitates the development of teacher leaders and supports their professional autonomy. It also nurtures the intrinsic motivation that leads to self-determination and the development of self-efficacy. Promoting self-determination and self-efficacy help teachers expand their leadership talents and creativity.

Theme 4: Shared Leadership and Professional Autonomy

Each principal selected different ways to encourage teachers to become leaders by giving them leadership resources and opportunities. As the principals develop and maintain a supportive

relationship with individual teachers, they are able to recognize individual talents, strengths, and interest in leadership. Some teacher leaders assumed a variety of roles to support the school and student success in classrooms, while others offered to take leadership roles at the district level. Principal Three utilized staff meetings and school-wide activities that incorporated the 7 Habits, including grade level meetings led by teachers and district-wide opportunities. Table 9 illustrates the way all three principals encourage and all three staffs accept opportunities to lead and share professional responsibility for student success.

Table 9
Cross-Case Summary of Theme Four: Shared Leadership and Professional Autonomy

Overarching Themes	Collective Sub-Themes	Elements	Case One	Case Two	Case Three
4. Shared Leadership and Professional Autonomy			X	X	X
	4-A. Encouraged by principals		X	X	X
		4A-1. Lead to student success	X	X	X
		4A-2. Implemented specific programs		X	X
		4A-3. Specialist for a grade level and facilitate grade level meetings	X	X	X
		4A-4. Take on new challenges/ Become part of a leadership team	X		X
	4-A. Accepted and proposed by teachers		X	X	X
		4A-1. Reflection on student needs and own needs, take initiative	X	X	X
		4A-2. Extend strategies/ techniques	X	X	X

Once principals became aware of teacher talents and aspirations, teachers were invited to become members of at least one of the school teams. (See Table 9) Principal Two inspired teachers to sign up to be a specialist (reading, math, science, social studies) for their grade level and facilitate grade level meetings that focused on their specialty. Principal One cultivated leadership skills in her teachers by encouraging them to take on new challenges, and often

employed this strategy with teachers who would not normally take any initiative. Several of her teachers also became part of the school-wide leadership team. Principal Three provided teachers opportunities to be chairs of grade level team or members of the Lighthouse Team, along with designing activities to review or extend the 7 Habits. Whether an experienced teacher was challenged to mentor a new or struggling teacher, or if a teacher or group of teachers was asked to share a new teaching strategy, all teachers were given the tools and opportunities to assume leadership roles.

Leadership roles accepted by teachers included mentoring, peer observation, PD activity leaders, and district team members. Moreover, some leadership roles were proposed by teachers as they determined how to meet their own needs or the needs of their own students. Reflecting on the needs of students and teaching practices in reaching the vision of the school has encouraged teachers to extend strategies or techniques, whether by trying new ideas in classrooms or by sharing with others in school-wide or district meeting. For instance, the kindergarten teachers who could not find an opportunity to meet decided to meet during their lunchtime. Another teacher asked if she could observe other teachers when she had a problem and the principal had run out of other suggestions. Providing various opportunities to foster the leadership skills empowered teachers to build strong interactions with peers, families and the communities to maximize opportunities for student learning. The more principals cultivate leadership in others, the more a collaborative culture grows in the school.

Theme 5: Expanding a Culture of Collaborative Learning and Shared Leadership

By empowering teachers to take leadership roles, the principals encouraged the exploration of new ways to interact with students, their parents, and the community at large. Table 5 shows that each principal aims to increase student engagement in learning and the

school's culture by having students take leadership positions in the classroom and around the school. Principal Three takes a step further and really stresses empowering student leaders, as she offered professional development through *The Leader in Me* and 7 Habits that would prepare teachers to build leadership skills of students. Principal Two also modeled and promoted building leadership skills in the older students who could assist younger students in meeting their academic goals. Teachers under Principal One were encouraged to develop critical thinking and problem solving, so students were more engaged in classroom activities. Even though each principal promoted different strategies that teachers could use to promote student leadership skills, they all encouraged teachers to find ways to get students engaged in their own learning and achieving of school goals. Table 10 illustrates how all three principals extend collaboration and shared leadership to students and the community.

Table 10
Cross-Case Summary of Theme Five: Expanding a Culture of Collaborative Learning and Shared Leadership

Overarching Themes	Collective Sub-Themes	Elements	Case One	Case Two	Case Three
5. Expanding a Culture of Collaborative Learning and Shared Leadership			X	X	X
	5-A. Student taking leadership positions in the classroom and around the school		X	X	X
		5A-1. Empower student leaders			X
		5A-2. Building leadership skills in the older students		X	
		5A-3. Developing critical thinking and problem solving	X		
	5-B. Developing community engagement		X	X	X
		5B-1. Involve families and the community in learning about and promoting school goals and expectations	X		X

Table 10 – Continued

Overarching Themes	Collective Sub-Themes	Elements	Case One	Case Two	Case Three
		5B-2. Providing activities for parents could foster the ideas and skills in their students			X
		5B-3. Using community members as tutors and coaches for students		X	

Along, with encouraging teachers to empower students to take leadership roles, principals worked to engage parents and the community in helping students reach higher levels of academic achievement and personal responsibility. Principal One helped built a strong culture of parent-school engagement that motivated teachers to find ways to involve families and the community in learning about and promoting school goals and expectations. Principal Three felt strongly about engaging parents and the community, and provided activities around *The Leader in Me* and 7 Habits so parents could foster the ideas and skills in their students. This led to using social media to engage the families and community. The involvement of the community for Principal Two included ties with Communities in Schools to assist in creating a positive learning environment using community members as tutors and coaches for students. This led to parents and community members assisting in the development of school and teacher goals. Building leadership skills in parents and involving the community in goal setting further enhanced teacher and student leadership skills, and built a school culture of continuous learning that all principals wished to achieve.

Chapter IV Summary

A thick, rich description of the principal interviews offered insights into their leadership philosophy, practices, and approaches that facilitate building a collaborative school culture

where teacher autonomy and professionalism are recognized as essential for student achievement. The teachers' perspective at all three schools aligns with the principals' focus on collaboration, autonomy, and shared leadership. The cross-case analysis of the three schools reveals common elements that each of the principals uses to empower teachers and encourage continuous learning and growth. I also found that these major themes fit together and that each theme builds on the previous theme to achieve a collaborative learning environment. Although there is a wide variation of details in the work of each principal based on the various initiatives and programs going on in their schools, I found that there is a strong commonality in the essence of their work.

Their leadership styles focus on a vision of creating a professional learning environment, but each school looks different based on the leaders and their strategies. Each principal relies on keeping professional conversations going, stimulating collaboration through those conversations, using collaboration to support continuous learning, developing leadership tools and opportunities, and relying on shared leadership to enrich the school's culture. As the principals shared more about the school culture of their schools, it became apparent that when formal and informal conversations address substantive issues, the school truly has created a collaborative learning environment that models shared leadership behaviors and empowers all stakeholders to participate in supporting student achievement.

The principals built environments where teachers were motivated to collaborate, communicate, and learn together to foster student achievement. Because they trusted each other, they become part of a variety of teams, worked on the school improvement plans, and were willing to try new and innovated strategies to reach their goals. With their focus on communication, collaboration, and empowerment, the principals engaged teachers in

professional habits that encouraged teachers to be autonomous in ways that supported the school vision. The findings of this study will be discussed further in Chapter V to identify connections to the research questions and literature review. I will talk about the application for these finding as I explore connections to my country of Saudi Arabia.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to understand how elementary school principals build a collaborative school culture that develops and facilitates teacher professionalism and autonomy through continuous growth and development. This study aimed specifically at examining the actual activities and behaviors that elementary school principals use to encourage teachers to grow professionally and interdependently in ways that can motivate self-direction, which leads to achieving personal and student learning goals through reflecting on their own practices, practicing authentic self-assessment, and setting goals based on evidence of student achievement.

The study focused on an overarching questions supported by four sub-questions as follows:

What do school principals do to create a collaborative school culture that supports professional learning and development of their teachers?

1. How do principals enhance the thoughtful and reflective practices of teachers to enable them to grow professionally?
2. How do principals foster authentic self-assessment among teachers?
3. How do principals foster teachers' use of evidence-based goal setting for developing and refining teaching practice?
4. How do principals foster self-motivation so that teachers continuously learn and grow in their practice?

In the first sub-section of Chapter V, I will discuss how my study findings correspond to the study purpose and research questions. In the next sub-section, I will present a conceptual framework for understanding where and how my study results offer a nuanced way of

understanding how the principals in my three cases go about the work of developing and supporting teacher development, shared leadership, and autonomy. Following the unveiling of the framework, I will examine how my study results reinforce or extend the previous literature. In addition, utilizing the conceptual framework, I will propose recommendations for both leaders of K-12 elementary schools in general and for leaders of Saudi Arabian elementary schools in particular for how they might create a collaborative environment that grows because of ongoing, substantive conversations based on the example of the leaders in this case study. Finally, I will examine implications for policy and future research.

Results Connected to Research Questions

Sub-Question 1

The first research sub-question asked: How do principals enhance the thoughtful and reflective practices of teachers to enable them to grow professionally? I found that all three principles implemented ongoing actions for engaging teachers in the reflective process that guided them to better results in teaching and student learning no matter what their endeavor. According to the data, the principals always begin their school year by establishing school-wide goals and reviewing data that focus on improving teaching and student learning. This initial goal setting requires that teachers reflect on school-wide goals and examine how their previous personal goals supported the school's vision and expectations. This offers teachers opportunities to self-evaluate their teaching practices at the beginning of the year and identify areas in their practice that need the most attention in order to determine where they want to sharpen specific skills that would best benefit student learning. By analyzing and evaluating their own practices, and then recognizing personal strengths and weaknesses, teachers are better able to set appropriate goals and develop reasonable plans that drive continuous improvement. If teachers

have difficulties with reflection and goal setting, the principals provide one-on-one assistance. The goal is to make sure teachers take enough time for reflection before setting professional goals for self-improvement and enhancing student achievement.

Throughout the school year, principals rely on ongoing conversations and observations that emerge from informal walkthroughs or learning walks. According to the data, the principals continually encourage teachers to use self-reflection to analyze everything that happens during a lesson, so they can make improvements in their teaching strategies where necessary. Teachers are expected to plan their instruction using formative assessment and reflection to ensure that students are truly learning what has been taught. To support reflective practices after a walkthrough, the principals established a purposeful time, either face-to-face or online, for teachers to examine relevant data from their instruction. Such a close look at the collected data encourages teachers to reflect and identify specific areas for improvement as well as gain new insights and understanding. In this way, the principals empower teachers to take ownership of their own professional development.

When teachers have difficulties meeting their goals or meeting school expectations, the principals offered additional assistance. They provide a variety of resources, ideas, and strategies for improvement available for teachers to chart their own path toward continuous learning and improvement. These opportunities included holding follow-up meetings, working with district coaches, or working with peers who would mentor or coach a struggling teacher. This ongoing support provides honest feedback and fosters self-reflection that gives teachers an opportunity to progress towards their professional goals.

The principals also use frequent observations or walkthroughs and constant conversations using reflective questions to build the foundation for more formative, ongoing feedback. This

creates a system that encouraged teachers to think critically and focus on improving teaching skills rather than evaluating teacher performance. Instead of relying solely on summative assessment, these principals want to build formative assessment into each teacher's daily practices. To encourage teachers to do so, the principals provide immediate feedback to teachers any time they observe their work.

The principals use these informal observations and conversations to tie into the formal teacher evaluation process. The principals conduct formal, mid-year meetings that are followed by the end-of-the-year teacher evaluation meetings to determine if teachers have met their goals. Because the principals and teachers have been examining and discussing data and teaching practices throughout the school year, the formal evaluations quickly focus on how well each teacher has attained individual and student goals. More in-depth reflection moves teachers into setting new goals and determining professional development activities that will keep them on track to achieving their goals.

Professional development activities are a key component of professional practices because they assist teachers in making decisions concerning how to improve. With that in mind, the principals always encourage teachers to collaborate during staff or grade level meetings where they could put their heads together to identify better, more innovative, creative teaching approaches that better meet the needs of students. This spirit of collaboration, sharing, and reflection nurtures new ideas that will enhance self-improvement and student achievement. Both teachers and principals reference peer coaching and subject coaches as sources of professional development activities to expand the impact on student learning through ongoing reflective practices. The principals recognize the importance of using different strategies of continuous support to help teachers develop and grow professionally using the thoughtful and reflective

practices. This empowers teachers to use their autonomy to change things up or refine what they already do to stay fresh and become even more successful in responding to student needs.

Sub-Question 2

The second research sub-question asked: How do principals foster authentic self-assessment among teachers? Authentic self-assessment is embedded into the reflective practices that lead to goal setting. To foster authentic self-assessment, teachers begin by setting personal goals based on the school vision and student achievement results. Throughout the school year, teachers focus on reaching their goals through discussions of authentic teaching practices and student products, which can be any form of student work or engagement. These student products are also a focus for observations by the principal, a coach, a mentor, or a peer. In this way, the principals do not solely rely on the final evaluation system, but also employ a system where individual teachers are provided ongoing, continuous opportunities to sit with an observer and discuss what they did and how the students reacted. Whether the post-observation discussion is done in a one-on-one meeting or by using electronic methods, such as Google Docs or email, each teacher is provided with timely, immediate, and specific feedback using authentic data gathered during the observations.

Ongoing conversations that encourage teachers to use student engagement data to reflect on their teaching practices help develop strong ties between teachers and the principal, coach, or peers. These relationships also build trust between teachers and their principal or observer that support the use of reflective, substantive conversations that are essential for a truly authentic assessment. These healthy relationships are also important during the required formal teacher evaluations where teachers can identify, in a non-threatening and non-judgmental way, the changes that need to be made in teaching practices to better serve students. Using conversations

that include evidence-based feedback reduces subjectivity when discussing teaching practice and removes some of the emotion from the evaluation process. This allows teachers to engage in meaningful conversations and determine how effectively they are performing in the classrooms.

According to the data, the principals encourage teachers to continuously use formative assessments to discover evidence showing areas where their practices have improved student outcomes and areas where there is room for improvement. Making reflection evidence-based helps teachers increase honest appreciation of their own abilities, so they can decide which practices they need to change, adapt, include, or continue. The ability to reflect accurately by considering formative assessments of student growth is at the heart of authentic self-assessment because it drives teachers to make positive adjustments in their teaching based on student evidence.

In efforts to elevate their professional conversations with teachers, the principals use a rigorous evaluation rubric furnished by the district that helps guide honest and reflective dialogue. By using an observation checklist focused on evidence-based observations and formative assessments, teachers can focus their reflection on what they hoped would happen in the classroom, and the principal can document what was observed. In this way, the basis for teacher evaluation conferences is structured around evidence-based tools. For example, Principal Two used sections from Charlotte Danielson's rubric, in which he encouraged teachers to bring some documents that evidenced their achievements in specific sections of the rubric. This encouraged more reflective conversations by giving teachers something concrete to focus on and discuss with their principal. This also lets teachers examine their performance with students by showing documentation that demonstrated the effectiveness of the teaching and learning strategies chosen.

To better foster authentic self-reflection, the principals provide student data and gave time for teacher teams to examine student progress, so teachers can reflect as a team on how to use new strategies to help students improve. Working as a team to identify and experiment with new teaching/learning techniques helps teachers feel safe and comfortable in self-assessing and discussing successes and challenges. By sharing substantive conversations around student achievement and what they were doing in classrooms, teachers create a space for thoughtful questioning from their peers about teaching practices, identify areas where improvement is still needed, and afforded time to ask for help. These honest conversations foster authentic self-assessment that often begins with looking at data and accepting the reality that no one is perfect. In the end, engaging in healthy conversations, whether with other teachers during meetings or with principals after learning walks, builds a culture where teachers and principals are partners and teachers are collaborators around their own learning and growth.

Sub-Question 3

The third research sub-question asked: How do principals foster teachers' use of evidence-based goal setting for developing and refining teaching practices? Setting goals based on evidence of student achievement is related to thoughtful and reflective practice and authentic self-assessment. Teachers are required to set goals at the beginning of each school year, then have on-going conversations using authentic assessment to review the accomplishment of those goals during formal evaluation sessions. According to the data, all three principals worked with individual teachers, created groups of teachers, and/or offered assistance from mentors and coaches to ensure that there was a process that would support teachers in improving their teaching practices. Regardless whether these discussions were held between teachers or with a principal or a coach, the key to the successful goal-setting process is the ongoing conversations

on what a teacher is doing in the classroom and how students are reacting. In this way, principals enable teachers to determine whether or not their goals are being reached and identify the next steps for continued professional growth.

The process of setting goals starts with the beginning of a new academic year goal-setting process and becomes an integral element of the school culture through ongoing teacher and principal interactions throughout the year. These principals begin this process by sharing the school vision and establishing an ongoing process whereby teachers are continuously collecting and interpreting data to track student growth and the growth of their own practice. Thus, teachers develop the habit of setting professional goals by regularly assessing student performance, reflecting on data from classroom observations, and engaging in teacher-to-teacher dialogue about teaching practice and observed impact on student learning from that practice. Because teachers are consistently using relevant data, the principals know that these teachers are able to do evidence-based goal setting. To summarize, by using a more systematic approach of self-evaluation or reflection that develops critical thinking and professional inquiry, the principals assist their teachers in becoming more autonomous and empowered as practitioners who are constantly growing in their practice.

Sub-Question 4

The fourth research sub-question asked: How do principals foster self-motivation so that teachers continuously learn and grow in their practice? In examining this question, I found that while motivation comes from within an individual, there are external factors that can motivate a teacher to strive to reach professional goals. The things that the principals did to motivate teachers began with making the environment pleasant, then by being respectful and supportive. This included giving relevant data and information for setting and achieving goals, facilitating

opportunities to gain information from others, and encouraging use of a variety of strategies to achieve personal and student goals. Perhaps most important, the principals are honest with teachers about the importance and difficulties of being a teacher. Along with this empathy and validation, the principals trust teachers with taking leadership roles. This demonstrates that the principals believe teachers are knowledgeable and trust them to use that knowledge to achieve personal and student goals.

According to the data, the principals also attend to elements of continuous support that motivate teachers to grow professionally. Once teachers set their personal goals, the principals use the support of an instructional coach, a mentor, or peer coach to assist them in meeting those goals through meaningful evidence-based conversations. Although professional development activities took different forms throughout the year, these principals provide learning opportunities that relate to teacher goals and the needs of students. To support continuous learning, the principals find ways to help their teachers stay informed about research and promising practices. By establishing a culture to support and modeling lifelong learning, the principals foster the idea that there is always something new to learn. These principals were willing to learn from others by listening to what teachers are doing and how using a particular teaching approach can be successful with the students.

The principals encourage teachers to do self-assessments in a way that stimulates them to be self-motivated and take responsibility for developing their own professional growth plans to achieve their goals. Instead of telling teachers what to do, the principals expect them to become more self-directed by thinking more critically about whether or not they had achieved what they want to achieve. This requires teachers to constantly collect and analyze their own data to ensure that their teaching strategies engage students in learning. By regularly monitoring their own

performance and assessing progress in the light of student learning, teachers identify their own strengths and weaknesses, which, in turn, encourage them to come up with strategies to use during challenging situations or for developing new skills.

Throughout this process of self-assessment, the principals are respectful and teachers feel valued and supported in applying new ideas in their professional plans to maximize student achievement. To build on that autonomy, the principals plan meetings and other staff engagements to focus on information to inform practice. This encourages teachers to focus on how to better meet the needs of all students. During these honest conversations, the principals want teachers to take control of their own destiny by giving them the freedom to express their creative potential and by giving them a voice in decisions within a safe environment. Using the ongoing sharing of real data, encouragement, and support, the principals empower teachers to make their own independent decisions about how to improve their own instructional practices.

All three principals believe that each teacher has unique talents or skills that can be used to create a fulfilling, productive learning environment. In different ways, the principals mobilize the teachers' energy and capacity to be self-directed professionals who willingly take on leadership roles and take risks to meet their goals. By showing trust, appreciation, and recognition, teachers are motivated to not only try new things in the classrooms but also to talk about these efforts with their grade-level peers and even share both strategies and student results in the larger group at teacher meetings. These opportunities focus on and develop teachers' strengths. The principals provide teachers support, respect, and the freedom to make their own choices about how to create and maintain a culture of continuous learning in their classrooms. The principals understand the importance of creating a learning environment where teachers feel safe, supported, and engaged in taking risks. This sustainable, positive culture fosters trusting

relationships and the motivation to use creativity and professional autonomy to ensure continuous learning and professional growth.

Summary

Upon reflecting on the discussion above, I found that the four sub-questions are interrelated and supported by the same elements that each principal uses to enhance teaching practices and shared leadership that builds teacher autonomy. This illustrates that in order for teachers to continuously grow professionally and independently, it is essential to engage them in establishing their own goals that support the school's goals and vision. The first step in this process requires enhancing reflective practices through authentic self-assessment. All of the principals acknowledged that teachers cannot drive their own path of continuous improvement alone, but need continuous support and encouragement no matter their level of proficiency. These principals take explicit steps to engage with individual teachers in developing professional practices and meet their professional needs. In addition, they provide differentiated opportunities for teachers to learn and grow and facilitate collaborative activities to support that growth. This encourages teachers to work hand-in-hand to increase the academic achievement of all students by trying new ideas and by assuming different leadership roles that will further their own professional learning and growth.

Overarching Question

The overarching research question asked: What do school principals do to create a collaborative school culture that supports professional learning and development of teachers in ways that increase (a) reflective practices, (b) self-assessment, (c) self-direction, and (d) motivation to continue learning and developing their teaching practices? This study's findings offer important insights into the principal's role in creating and sustaining a culture of

professional growth where principals and teachers work together and support one another to reach the school's goals and vision. These three principals begin with building open, honest communication with the teachers through formal and informal conversations about teaching and student learning. These ongoing conversations build trust and respect as more time is provided for sharing different ideas and points of view that strengthen the reflective practices of each teacher. The principals provide quality time for teachers to reflect on and discuss student data. Within this professional leaning community, teachers were encouraged to observe each other and discuss the elements of teaching that engage students in learning. Extending conversation and trust provides a safe learning environment for peer observations, where teachers can open their classroom doors to share expertise, as well as to solicit suggestions to improve their own practices.

In short, when the principals guided teachers in setting professional goals, they initiate ongoing conversations between teachers, coaches and the principal. Because these conversations are ongoing and focused on goals, reflective practices are strengthened, and areas for improvement are identified. Once areas for improvement are identified, more conversation occurs leading teachers to be motivated to seek assistance or training and to feel safe in doing so. The principals also use observations and discussions to encourage teachers to work as teams or take leadership roles in further designing activities or programs that will lead to higher levels of teacher competency and student achievement. While each principal uses different strategies, all rely on open conversation and the development of each teacher's strengths to build a more collaborative learning environment that will support professional learning and teacher autonomy.

Revised Conceptual Framework

At the beginning of this research, the original conceptual framework focused on *what*

elementary school principals do to build teacher autonomy and professionalism for continuous learning and growth (see page 14). Through my review of the literature, a conceptual framework emerged depicting the importance of ongoing conversations that provide and nurture a collaborative learning environment that is essential for developing a teacher's learning and professional growth.

After examining my data, a new conceptual framework began to emerge to better describe the activities or behaviors that principals can incorporate to build a collaborative learning environment. More specifically, this framework serves as a fluid structure for understanding *how* principals are able to create a culture that supports learning in ways that increase (a) reflective practices, (b) self-assessment, (c) self-direction, and (d) motivation to ensure that teachers continue learning and developing their professional practices.

In the context of a collaborative culture, the three principals set a positive tone that empowered everyone to become involved in the process of setting and reaching school-wide goals so that all students could thrive. Each principal demonstrated the awareness of the importance of including teachers in goal-setting discussions and supporting them in developing their own professional goals while identifying resources they could use. At the same time, the principals wanted to build professional communities with shared values where teachers are fully committed to improving their teaching. To accomplish this, these principals utilized both formal and informal meetings to facilitate professional conversations where all teachers engaged in collaborative activities. Because these ongoing conversations were structured and practiced in a supportive environment, communication networks emerged and a shared language was used to support better instructional practices. By establishing meaningful relationships, teachers were encouraged to use honest dialogue and engage in substantive conversations. As conversations

became more substantive, teachers became more open with their peers and reflected on their own challenges, embraced new ideas, and observed other classrooms to improve their own practices.

In a culture of trust and collaborative learning, everyone understands that no one is perfect, and there is space for everyone to improve by helping each other and learning from one another. Thus, this collaborative approach stimulated continuous learning and shared leadership, where teachers are encouraged to be risk-takers and leaders, explore ways to improve their own practices, and share teaching strategies that can enrich learning. As the principals welcomed new challenges, teachers became more comfortable with taking different leadership roles, sharing with each other, and developing stronger relationships with all stakeholders.

Ongoing conversations was the center for developing open communication involving sharing and listening, and successfully establishing cohesive teams and teacher collaboration. As teachers built trust of each other, they became more open to learning from one another, which moved them to becoming continuous learners. With conversation and collaboration to build on, the principals incorporated different techniques of constant support that could help teachers in their quest to build professional practices within a safe and supportive learning environment. This approach reinforced a culture of shared leadership and professional autonomy by identifying the strengths of each teacher and recognizing individual interests in leadership. By increasing leadership capacity, teachers were empowered to expand their roles in leading their classrooms and supporting the school's overall success. Fostering the conditions for providing opportunities to grow teachers as leaders and stretching their skills helped grow a culture of collaborative learning and shared leadership that involved not only teachers but students, parents, and the community.

The findings of this study show that the use of conversation, collaboration, continuous

learning, and shared leadership expanded the primary mechanisms on which these principals built the professional growth of teachers. By relying on these elements and using them on a daily basis, the principals supported and encouraged teachers to continuously use reflective practices and authentic self-assessment to set their own goals, become self-directing, and commit to professional growth. Thus, the principals encouraged teachers to use reflective practices to support the continued success of their students. These ongoing interactions led teachers to develop their skills, knowledge, strategies, and understandings in ways that could support their self-efficacy for making decisions that would be valuable to the school and students. In other words, the feelings of empowerment, capability, and professional autonomy gave teachers the freedom to make decisions both in their classrooms and for their own development. Because teachers were aware of the school's goals and vision, their personal goals continually expanded their toolbox of teaching and learning strategies. In addition, the principals provided teachers the opportunities to do self-reflection and discuss insights with their peers to identify areas of improvement. As teachers developed their knowledge and skills, they knew that their principals trusted them to make appropriate decisions. By reflecting on the assessment of student learning and teaching ability during ongoing conversations, teachers set their goals for self-improvement, participated in professional development activities, worked together in teams, and made decisions to improve student achievement. Trust and empowerment gave teachers confidence to make decisions that moved students forward.

My initial examination of the topics, subtopics, and elements (Tables 6-10) showed continuous movement from one topic to the next with constant overlapping. At first, the action seemed to spiral out from the conversation, to build trust and collaboration, to share leadership in ways that involved the teachers, students, parents and community, as illustrated in Figure 2.

Everything began with ongoing conversations. The initial conversations can be depicted as pebbles of information that are shared and examined, then begin an outward movement. More conversations seemed to generate a better understanding of goals and develop more trust. With more trust comes more opportunities for collaboration that lead to shared decision-making and understanding areas of strength and areas where improvement is needed. Once needs are identified, they can be addressed with more conversations to gather additional information, communicate findings, collaborate to set new paths to reach goals, and so on. The greater the number of conversations, the greater the opportunities to build understanding and involvement and the stronger the action away from the center to sharing leadership, building professionalism and strengthening teacher autonomy. All of these elements ultimately support better outcomes for students.

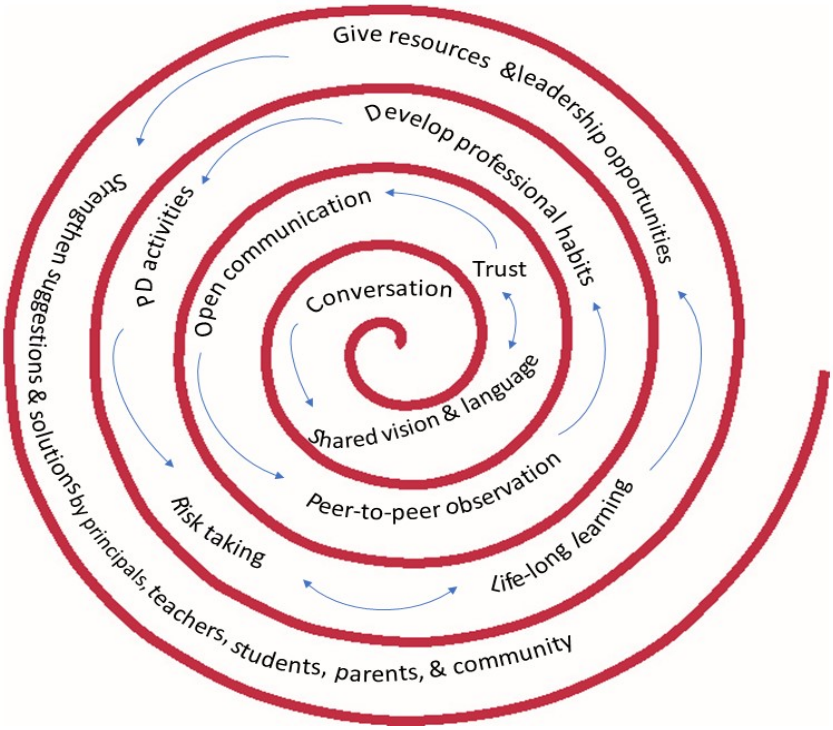

Figure 2. The Flow of Findings with Reference to the Cross-Case Analysis

By digging deeper into the findings and reflecting on the elements of conversation, collaboration, continuous learning and shared leadership, it was evident that one element flowed into the next to expand the culture of collaborative learning more than with just a spiral effect. These were not distinct elements, but more like ripples that spread out from a single stone of conversation dropped into the water as the image below illustrates. The initial action of purposeful conversations initiated by each principal created ripples that then spread throughout their schools. Each conversation created energy that led first to collaboration between the principal, teachers and coaches, which rippled into continuous learning, and was strengthened by shared leadership that expanded the school culture. Every conversation between a teacher and a principal, between teachers during staff and grade level meeting, and every interaction with parents and community member were stones dropped in the water. When more stones are dropped, more ripples emerged, and the richer the school culture became. The image shows that these ripples blend together in a circular pattern, and that their connectivity with all the other ripples is what creates a cohesive and vibrant collaborative environment.

Figure 3. Al-Ramel (2019) Revised Conceptual Framework

The priority given to conversations went beyond a spiral with the principal at the center to the core of a ripple effect where the principals created strong connections and consistent messaging that reinforced the culture of collaborative learning and shared leadership. These ongoing conversations were not just surface conversations, but purposeful, substantive conversations that sent a ripple of trust and respect where everyone could feel that their ideas were valued, and that they were valued. In other words, the strength of these ongoing conversations that valued everybody's ideas, and reinforced trust in the fact that everybody was doing their best even when they make mistakes. Because of this, everyone felt empowered to participate in conversations and collaboration to help the school reach its goals. Therefore, the more that respectful, substantive conversations happened, the more people were willing to add to the conversations and admit when there were problems then examine those problems from

different perspectives. In this way, new approaches could be tried and better results achieved. Building these purposeful, interpersonal relationships led to open communication that facilitated collaboration. This built synergy by creating different centers of energy and multiple ripples that empowered every teacher to become a leader and a lifelong learner. My research shows that a ripple effect emerges when the ongoing, purposeful conversations and activities lead to a stronger culture for professional growth and autonomy, and demonstrates a more accurate way of describing how principals' hands-on leadership facilitates the professional growth of teachers and in turn better outcomes for students.

Drawing on my new conceptual framework, I realized that the principals focused on an ongoing process of conversation and interactions with teachers that helped teachers feel valued, become willing to work together, share what they knew, and try something new (see graphic below). This encourages teachers to develop their knowledge, skills, and understanding of the school's vision and expectations, and to be independent and self-directed learners. The more teachers grow professionally, the more they feel autonomous in an interdependent way. Teachers in these schools feel empowered to work together while also making their own decisions in their classrooms. Teachers realize that they do their best job when they create a support system with other people about how to benefit the entire school. This fosters a sense of interdependence where teachers are not isolated from others, but know that their success depends on the success of everyone with whom they work.

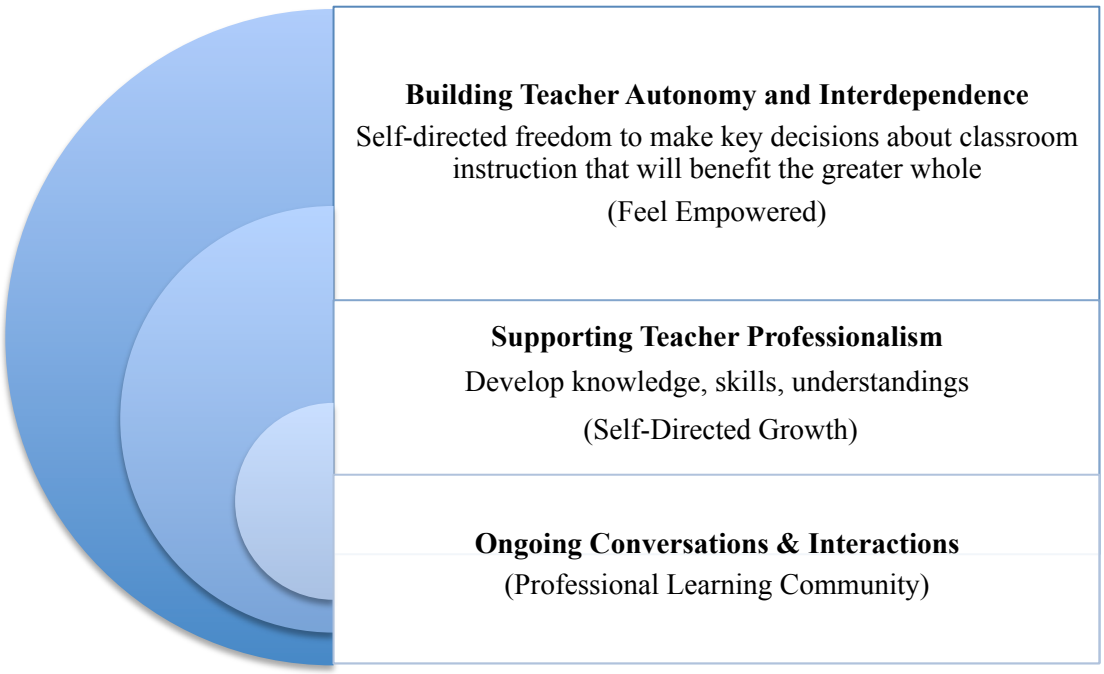

Figure 4. Development of Teacher Professionalism, Autonomy, and Interdependence

Relationship of Results to Existing Studies

Literature Highlights

Literature on school development suggests that increasing a school's capacity for improvement is at the core of every principal's role (Gimbel et al., 2011; Fullan 2014; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). Instructional leadership requires the school principal to assume the role of staff developers who foster the conditions that make a difference in the quality of both teaching and learning (Gurr et al., 2006; Hallinger & Heck, 2011; May & Supovitz, 2011). In this regard, research has identified a number of key leadership practices that are necessary ingredients of sustained school improvement. This set of core practices includes focusing on the schools' mission and goals, on active involvement in supporting teaching practices, and on the development of a trusting working environment and open communication that exude collaboration and empowerment (Blasé & Blasé, 1999a; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Robinson et al,

2008).

Timperley (2011a) proposes that teacher learning and growth is dependent on the systematic support that school principals provide as well as their close relationships with teachers. Employing direct interactions with individual teachers using both formal and informal evaluations, coupled with ongoing meaningful conversations, are essential ingredients in helping teachers meet their professional goals (Anast-May et al., 2011; Blase & Blase, 1999; Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Waters et al., 2003). Current teacher evaluation systems expect school principals to employ an ongoing system for observation and meaningful, constructive feedback that leads to improvement (Feeney, 2007). These systematic evaluations identify appropriate support, such as opportunities for peer observation (Kraft & Gilmour, 2016; Lochmiller, 2016; Maslow & Kelley, 2012). Receiving quality feedback during the evaluation process has been shown to increase teachers' self-reflection and self-awareness about their own teaching that are stimulated by professional learning activities (Cosh, 1999; Drago-Severson, 2012; Tuytens & Devos, 2014). Other studies have suggested the advantages of involving teachers in peer-coaching programs since they increase reflective practices of teachers and their capacity to develop new instructional strategies to best meet student-learning needs (Gonen, 2016; Huston & Weaver, 2008; Lu, 2010). Increasing teachers' participation in ongoing professional development activities has also been shown to improve the quality of their instructional practices (Tournaki et al., 2011) and stimulate trying new things that lead to better teaching (Thoonen et al., 2011). Moreover, engaging teachers in collaborative discussions during these professional development activities contributes to facilitating changes in their classroom practices (Goddard et al., 2007; Parise & Spillane, 2010).

The principals who incorporate instructional leadership practices create a collaborative

learning culture that provides opportunities for teachers to be active learners as they develop and grow in their professional knowledge, skills, and capacities (Kraft & Papay, 2014). By providing opportunities for high quality professional development and a supportive collegial school environment, principals can significantly impact student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Hallinger, & Heck, 2010; Supovitz et al., 2010). From a collaborative practice point of view, Sebastian and Allensworth (2012) emphasized the importance of establishing a safe and collegial school learning culture that supports individual teachers in improving student-learning outcomes. Another relevant study conducted by Lai (2015) adds that school principals strengthen a teacher's capacity to improve teaching and learning practices by fostering a collaborative culture that encourages teachers to work with and learn from each other by supporting their interactions with other teachers. Such networks support the development and growth of shared leadership by involving teachers in making decisions regarding the school's curriculum and practices. Cook (2014) recognized the importance of sharing decision making among teachers and stakeholders that promotes a professional learning community and ensures continuous school improvement.

Research sheds light on teacher teams as a common school improvement strategy that school principals use to develop a professional learning communities (Scribner et al., 2007; Vernon-Dotson & Floyd, 2012). This builds trust among teachers, so they are more likely to engage in collegial, purposeful conversations about instructional practice and participate in the decision-making process. This open, honest, and healthy school culture creates productive opportunities for teacher learning and growth, as they work together to diagnose problems, discuss issues, and share problems solving strategies during team planning time (Gimbel et al., 2011). In essence, research suggests that enriching frequent interaction between individuals is a necessary element for successful school leadership. Thoughtful decisions do not come from a

single individual; rather, they emerge from collaborative dialogues and shared leadership that encourage open, ongoing communication around teaching and learning (Spillane et al., 2004). When teachers are engaged in a collaborative learning environment, they develop trust, become willing to discuss difficult topics and solve problems, gain new skills and understanding, and accept opportunities to take a leadership role. Recognizing teachers as professionals has received a great deal of attention since Ingersoll and Alsalam (1997) addressed the importance of including teachers in making key decisions regarding educational issues. This collaboration promotes shared accountability for student learning and fosters continuous school improvement (Hallinger, & Heck, 2010; Marks & Printy, 2003) as working conditions support teacher motivation, satisfaction, professionalism, and empowerment (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005; Power & Goodnough, 2019; Stockard & Lehman 2004).

Finally, previous literature identified and explained the behaviors of principals as independent actions, which could provide teachers with collaborative opportunities to interact when addressing teaching and learning issues and offer timely, specific feedback on evaluations. By employing these strategies, principals engender positive interpersonal relationships, build trust, and solicit input from their teachers when making important decisions. This empowers teachers to make autonomous decisions in their own classrooms, demonstrate high self-efficacy, and become more motivated to engage in continuous learning and growth. The findings of this study confirm previous studies while bringing forward a new question related to the researcher's inability to separate one action from another. Lambert (2003) stated that for the development of leadership capacity "a rhythm of development – a personal and collective ebb and flow – is necessary for staff members" (p. 94). Even though most of the techniques these three principals used are aligned with the previous literature surrounding principal leadership, my own research

shows how the overlapping and cohesive interactions of these elements ebb and flow, and how they work together in systematic and consistent ways toward achieving teacher and student goals.

Extension to Previous Research

Unlike the studies cited above, which focused on individual elements of leadership, I found that it was difficult to separate the principals' role in ongoing conversations from their support of teacher autonomy and shared leadership during the development of a collaborative learning culture. By examining the behaviors of the principals as ongoing actions instead of discrete events, it became evident that they are part of an ongoing process involving the principal and individual teachers, teachers as teams, principal and teacher teams, teachers and students, principal with students and parents, teachers with parents, and so on. These interactions cannot be separated. This leads to an understanding that the actions not only spiral out from the initial conversations, but are also energized by these ongoing conversations. In addition, the findings from this study suggest that the principal need not be the only one who starts or extends a conversation, once these conversations become the norm in the school culture and teachers and others feel valued and empowered to initiate these conversations and encourage their colleagues and other stakeholders to do so as well.

All three principals used formal conversations during meetings to model how to converse with one another, then used the same approach to have substantive conversations in less formal situations after class walkthroughs and in other interactions with teachers, such as discussing new ideas around the lunch table. The more conversations were held, the more trust was built, and the more teachers and principals increased respect for one another's ideas. Hence, my study found that conversations build trust and respect that leads to a more positive, safe, and consistent

environment that encourages teachers to start collaborating in order to improve teaching and learning to reach school and personal goals. In other words, ongoing conversations at formal and informal levels offer engagement that leads to substantive conversations where teachers collaborate to get to the essence of problems and to find new and better ways to solve problems. This builds rapport between teachers and offers a mechanism for peer learning and continual improvement. As teachers collaborate and listen to one another, they became continuous learners who seek information and use that information and identify new best solutions, thus becoming risk takers.

These substantive conversations lead to sharing the leadership, because collaborative groups work on difficult problems around the school, different concerns with students and so on. This means that a variety of people are working and leading small groups and getting to the heart of what is happening in order to seek solutions. Hence, people other than the principal are able to take leadership roles. For example, in the cases I examined, the teachers may be looking at different teaching strategies, so they went to different conferences. When they came back, they taught each other what they learned and took the responsibility to use and share what they learned to help reach the school goals.

In addition, the leadership was not only shared between the teachers and the principal, but was often expanded to the students, the parents and the community. In short, conversations in formal settings, like staff meetings, and informal settings, such as multiple visits to the classrooms, promoted trust and opened sharing that moved to substantive conversations focused on solving school concerns or facilitating teacher evaluation meetings. The strong trusting connections between conversations and the activities related to meeting school and individual goals involved teachers working together and taking a variety of roles involving shared

leadership while strengthening the teacher autonomy that impacted teaching and learning.

The principals referred to professional development as continuous learning or a growth mindset. Identified activities were supported by goal setting, teacher reflection on how well those goals were being achieved, continuous walkthroughs or coaching, and peer meetings. Those activities included or were followed by conversations about what happened and how students reacted, and sometimes how the actions related to teacher goals. In his or her own way, each principal in this study wanted to provide meaningful feedback on an ongoing basis that could assist teachers in enriching his/her own language of reflection. Informal conversations and feedback flowed into formal evaluation that reviewed all of the activities related to observations in classrooms, conversations, and collaboration for problem solving that led teachers to reflect, then update their goals and start the process again.

Overall, all three principals utilized ongoing conversations to work collaboratively with teachers and develop a consistent, cohesive school culture where everyone could share strong educational values and work interdependently to pursue continuous improvement and be committed to professional practices. By putting the needs of students at the forefront of the teacher's mind, along with establishing a clear sense of direction and purpose for schools, the principals created a predictable school environment that encouraged continuous learning and growth. Although each principal used different strategies to foster teacher professionalism and autonomy, they all worked on the same foundation of setting goals, developing teacher collaboration, and encouraging each teacher to apply their knowledge to improve student achievement. By beginning with respectful, engaging conversations in more formal settings and extending those conversations to more informal settings, then flowing back into more formal conversations, the ongoing conversations led to continuous learning through sharing information

with teachers or eliciting information from teachers as a reflective process. That empowered teachers to share leadership because they understood goals and how to reach them, and felt confident in transferring that knowledge to better teaching for learning.

The findings of my study contribute to the growing body of research by providing insight into how the elements of conversation, collaboration, continuous learning, and shared leadership come together to expand a coherent and integrated synergy, which creates a collaborative learning environment. Even though most of these individual elements were discussed in the previous literature, my research shows that they are not distinct, different, disconnected elements. Rather, they are interrelated and blended, sometimes with a splash or a smash, and through a ripple effect, they flow into one another. In the three cases I studied, the continuity and the flow of these elements are essential to the point that, if one of them falls apart, the outward flow from conversation to collaboration, to continuous learning, and eventually, to shared leadership for continuous improvement of student outcomes could slow down, falter, or even stop.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

The community of collaboration and continuous improvement that each of the three principals created built a solid understanding of the importance of conversation and reflection that added to the teachers' feelings of autonomy and confidence for professional learning and growth. Their approach emphasizes the importance of the conversations that take into consideration the kind of questioning and listening needed to address challenges that enrich ongoing enhancement of teacher knowledge and practice. It recognizes that each teacher is a professional and has the ability to reach personal goals and the goals of the school. Thus, the nature of these conversations or interactions is often generative or cognitively focused to draw

the best out of what the teachers know and think. In this case study, principals dealing with teachers respectfully as knowledgeable professionals helped secure honest input and active participation in the decision-making process. The more open the conversations with listening and sharing are, the more trusting relationships, respect, collegiality, and motivation are created. This in turn leads to productive, satisfying, and beneficial outcomes for students.

This climate of trust draws out the best in teachers, facilitates their authentic participation, and empowers their interdependence and willingness to try new ideas, make mistakes, share expertise, and learn from one another. As principals demonstrate a higher level of respect for teachers and value their efforts, the school community is more likely to support innovation and risk-taking. Sharing generates collective knowledge builds a stronger community within the school. In short, collective knowledge is synergy.

My findings suggest that principals must recognize the positive aspects of teacher performance while understanding that not everything will be perfect. By encouraging teachers to try new things, the principals must recognize that not every idea will work exactly as planned. In these cases, they embrace mistakes made as a way of finding better ways that produce substantive, positive results in the long term. In a culture that accepts failure as an inherent part of learning, teachers accept their own vulnerability and feel comfortable sharing their ideas freely instead of avoiding them; they also discuss problems more thoroughly by creating space for addressing solutions creatively.

The cases I studied suggest principals can use reflective conversations to deal with challenges as they come, trusting that all teachers have applied their knowledge, tried something new, and are willing to share. These best practices foster respectful, trusting conversations by modeling genuine listening habits to others and openly inquiring into teachers' opinions. The

more the conversations are respectful and trusting, the more they elicit ideas and promote the collective efficacy of teachers. As ideas are shared, they elicit nuggets of new information, because everyone is willing to add input and sift through information to determine the best outcomes. The findings and the discussion of this study suggest the importance of professional conversations that increase teacher trust as a priority and are well worth the time invested. Without maintaining and fostering these conversations, principals might be limited in their ability to build a cohesive professional community where everyone engages in collaborative decision-making and exploring new practices.

Application to Principals in Saudi Arabia

The education system in Saudi Arabia is characterized as a centralized system where the Ministry of Education (MOE) has the main responsibility for managing education and has the power of legislation, decision-making, and planning. In addition, the Ministry of Education has a great influence over designing and developing the education curriculum as well as the evaluation systems for teachers and administrators. The authority of teachers and administrators in the education systems is very limited. Principals have limited power for designing educational plans in the schools and are not usually involved in the decision-making process.

Even though the system in Saudi Arabia does not expect or empower principals to create policy or make high-level decisions about curriculum, instruction and performance assessment or development, school principals can apply my findings to their work by being more active and interactive with their classroom teachers. Within parameters set by the Ministry of Education, there is still plenty of room for principals to engage with teachers in ways that foster continuous growth through reflective practice. This will require principals to expand their instructional leadership role by including multiple formal and informal observations and conversations. This

will provide teachers with formative feedback that supports professional growth and elicits conversations about increasing student achievement. Creating the necessary conditions for teacher collaboration and coaching should also be essential part of their leadership practices. In addition, principals could assign experienced teacher-leaders to collaborate with other teachers and provide support and assistance, especially with newer teachers.

While there is much principals can do to engage more directly and constructively with teachers to foster reflective practice focused on improved student outcomes, in order to also foster more teacher autonomy and shared leadership, principals will need to exercise a greater level of autonomy that allows them to work more independently. When schools operate under less hierarchical structures, principals are more empowered to utilize instructional leadership skills and include more teachers in school decision-making. This encourages the development of a collective vision of the purpose and values that promotes leadership and autonomy in everyone. Additionally, when principals are trusted with more decision-making prerogative, they can share that prerogative with their teachers. When principal supervisors engage with principals through constructive and reflective conversations focused on student learning, they can feel more confident to do so with their teaching staff.

In addition, Saudi principals could also be encouraged and trained to make the educational system more like the culture of a family, where friendly and supportive relationships with people are developed. Teachers could share their individual teaching styles, distinct skills, and talents that helped them become successful. When teachers combine all their skills and knowledge, they create a unique culture for learning. In order for each school's principal and staff to feel that they have the ability to make a difference in student learning, there must be a sense of empowerment that encourages teachers to feel comfortable in sharing their views or

ideas on what students should learn and how instruction can be improved. Principals need to understand that it is okay to try new strategies and make mistakes, as there is always something to learn. Respect should always be shown when something does not work as hoped for. Working together in this way builds a sense of synergy for coming up with new solutions to advance student learning. This bottom-up culture enhances communication and empowers a broader base of well-informed problem solvers.

Implications and Recommendations for Policy

As a result of my research, I propose several recommendations for how to develop leadership practices where principals strengthen their school culture. The first recommendation for policy is related to principal preparation that will encourage principals to start more conversations and have more interactions with teachers. This would relate to principals around the world, no matter the country or culture. The policy needs to make sure that principals are well prepared to take a leadership position in their schools. This may be a shift in current policy for developing and supporting principals. If so, the focus should prepare principals to operate confidently as the head of the schools, and accept ultimate accountability for setting goals and achieving them.

Education policy in Saudi Arabia should help the Ministry of Education shift its focus to incorporate greater emphasis on developing principals' leadership skills and supporting them in utilizing those skills to foster continuous improvement in student outcomes. Ministry policies and practices could also help foster this growth in student outcomes by encouraging principal supervisors to develop professional dialogues with and between principals where everyone is treated with respect, and everyone is respected for the knowledge that they bring to the table. If principal supervisors employed more strategies to foster safe, reflective, evidence-based

conversations with principals, these conversations could guide principals to become better listeners who can solicit ideas and lay out possibilities to help set goals while including more teachers, support staff, parents, and even students in understanding what the goals are and how to reach them. As stakeholders have a clearer understanding of what school goals are meant to accomplish and feel empowered to share their knowledge, they will become more active in supporting school success. Incorporating strong communication systems will bridge the power gap between principal supervisors, school principals and teachers and bring them closer together to improve student-learning experiences.

In addition, principals in Saudi Arabia need a solid background in academics, not just in one subject area, but also in overall academics. They also must understand shared leadership behaviors and what it means to be a good leader. To achieve this, the Ministry policies must define what principal development looks like and what type of supervision principals will receive. Policies must make sure that administrators at the regional level are supporting the principals to be the school leaders and not trying to undermine or take over the leadership of the school. If policy encourages principals to take an instructional leadership role within their schools, the Ministry of Education can support their development as instructional leaders by providing ongoing workshops and follow-up visits to the schools by regional directors and supervisors. Ongoing training would also include designing training programs in areas of shared leadership behaviors and what it means to be a leader who develops his/her ability toward leading a collaborative learning environment.

An essential part of these policy recommendations give principals the ability to not only engage with the teachers, but also with the larger community. This includes involving all stakeholders in conversations, including the administrators, to help strengthen school goals and

extend academic conversations. This could encourage principals to take more initiative to include all stakeholders in conversations and delegate tasks and responsibilities among a larger group of people. Creating opportunities to interact with outside environment will help school principals understand that their schools are not isolated from the outside world.

Implications for Future Research

This research is limited to three principals in Southwest Michigan, so it is limited in scope. In order to gain more information regarding a principal's effects on building a collaborative school culture that values teacher growth and autonomy, researchers can examine principals in other schools that fit this study's participant criterion for being principals recognized as fostering a culture of student achievement focused professional learning and development, along with shared leadership and a culture of mutual respect and trust. They can then compare principal behaviors in those schools to determine which leadership behaviors those principals demonstrate. Other research could test my model to determine how the ripple effect works with larger samples to determine universal results. This could include studies to see if the ripple effect works the same way with a larger number of school principals within different environments or in different countries.

Concluding Thoughts

"The idea that everything is purposeful really changes the way you live. To think that everything that you do has a ripple effect, that every word that you speak, every action that you make affects other people and the planet" (Moran, n.d.). Lambert (2003) expands on the power of our interactions by writing, "If relationships enable us to care, trust and risk, structures are the media through which we do so. When we interact, synergy gives us the will to succeed together" (p. 93). Building upon the insights gleaned from this research into how a collaborative learning

environment develops teachers to become responsible for their own learning in ways that will empower them to use their autonomy to benefit the greater whole, I have proposed a conceptual model for understanding how conversations, collaboration, continuous learning and shared leadership work together within a ripple effect process to foster a collaborative learning environment that encourages and empowers teachers to grow as professionals and interdependent leaders. The model depicts how conversations that are an integral part of a principal's day-to-day activities can start a "ripple effect" that engenders collaboration, continuous learning, and shared leadership. My findings also suggest that it is both the frequency, constancy, and continuity of these daily conversations, and the nature of the conversations, that power the flow or ripples outward to build the culture.

These conversations are not separate tasks to complete then move on; they happen in regular encounters between the school's staff members and initiate an ongoing process that enhances trust, respect, listening, and openness. The more time principals invest in professional conversations, the better the chance that they will be successful at creating a collaborative learning environment where teachers feel empowered to participate. The more positive the nature of the conversations initiated within an organization, the larger the outward action or waves, and the more opportunities for teachers to collaborate, which then leads to continuous learning using professional autonomy and developing leadership skills. By employing these communication skills, principals expand everyone's participation in shared leadership, which strengthens a natural flow of teacher collaboration, professionalism, and autonomy.

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Appendix A

Principal Recommendation Letter

Dear (Insert Name)

You are receiving this email because, we believe that you can help recommend elementary principals who would make good candidates for participating in a dissertation study about, "Principal Leadership and the Development of Teacher Professionalism and Autonomy within a Collaborative School Culture." My name is Sukinah Al Ramel and my doctoral committee chairperson is Dr. Patricia Reeves of WMU. Dr. Reeves and I have great interest in how elementary principals work with their teachers in ways that support their learning and growth and build a positive culture of support, so this is the focus for my study. I wish to learn as much as possible about this part of a principal's work, so I can help develop the work of principals back in my country of Saudi Arabia.

We are seeking recommendations for identifying elementary principals in the southwest area of Michigan who fit the following description: *The principal works with teachers to build a collaborative school culture which supports the learning and growth of teachers and engages teachers in shared decision making.* The principal also:

a. Engages with teachers to build a collaborative culture for teacher learning and growth.
b. Encourages teachers to assess and reflect on their own practice.
c. Encourages teachers to use evidence of student learning to establish goals for their own professional growth.

If you think that this description fits an elementary principal in southwest Michigan, please reply to this email with the name of that principal, the name of the principal's school and district, and either an email address or contact phone number for that principal if you have that information as well.

It is critical to the value of our study that we find examples of elementary principals who are dedicated to teacher development in a collaborative and supportive learning and professional school culture. We appreciate any thought you might give to making a recommendation. Thank you, so much, for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Sukinah Al Ramel, doctoral student
Dr. Patricia Reeves, doctoral committee chair

Appendix B

Participant Recruitment Letters

Dear Principal,

You are receiving this email, because (insert name) identified you as a principal who works with teachers to develop a collaborative culture in which teachers are supported in their learning and growth and contribute to the shared leadership in your school. That makes you a wonderful candidate for participating in a study that I am conducting for my PhD dissertation at Western Michigan University (WMU).

My name is Sukinah Al Ramel and my doctoral committee chairperson is Dr. Patricia Reeves of WMU. Dr. Reeves and I have great interest in how principals work with their teachers in ways that support their learning and growth and build a positive culture of support. I wish to learn as much as possible about this part of a principal's work, so I can help develop the work of principals back in my country of Saudi Arabia.

I am writing to invite you to learn more about participating in my study entitled "Principal Leadership and the Development of Teacher Professionalism and Autonomy within a Collaborative School Culture." As you were highly recommended as a principal who fits my study criteria, I hope you will contact me (see my contact information below) to learn more about my study and how you can participate.

To participate in this study you must have completed, at least, two years of work as principal at your current school, received an effective or highly effective rating on your most recent administrator evaluation conducted under Michigan requirements, and indicate that the following items describe your work with teachers:

d. I engage with teachers in multiple ways to build a collaborative culture for teacher learning and growth.
e. I encourage teachers to assess and reflect on their own practice.
f. I encourage teachers to use evidence of student learning to establish goals for their own professional growth.

If you participate in my study, I will ask you to participate in two interviews. The first interview will give me a chance to learn about the strategies and activities you use to develop and support teachers as described in items a-c above. I will also ask you to help me invite your teachers to participate in a 20-minute activity where I will ask them to list the strategies and activities you use to address items a-c. After I gather that data from your teachers, I will ask you to do a second interview with me so you can reflect on how your teachers describe your work with them. The total amount of time needed for the two interviews will be 90-120 minutes. Finally, I will need to complete the collection of this data by the end of May 2018.
If you are interested in learning more about this study, please contact me by replying by email to sukinahalim.alramel@wmich.edu or feel free to contact me by phone at (616) 635-0348. I hope to hear from you since you are considered a prime example of a principal who works with teachers to build a collaborative culture that supports their learning and growth.

Sincerely,

Sukinah Al Ramel, doctoral student

Dear Teacher,

Your principal was recommended to me as a principal who works with teachers to build a collaborative culture that supports teachers' learning and growth. That makes your principal a good participant for my PhD dissertation study. My name is Sukinah Al Ramel and I am Ph.D. student in Western Michigan University. Dr. Patricia Reeves is my dissertation chairperson, and we are very interested in learning how teachers in the schools of principals recommended for our study describe the actual strategies and activities the principal uses to:

a. Engage with teachers to build a collaborative culture for teacher learning and growth.
b. Encourage teachers to assess and reflect on their own practice.
c. Encourage teachers to use evidence of student learning to establish goals for their own professional growth.

The title of my study is: "Principal Leadership and the Development of Teacher Professionalism and Autonomy within a Collaborative School Culture." Your principal has agreed to participate in my study, so I am writing to invite you to participate in a short staff session that your principal has scheduled on (insert date, time, and location). In this session, I will ask you to spend about 20 minutes responding to a short questionnaire where you will list strategies and activities that your principal has used in the last two years in the above three areas. At the beginning of the 30-minute staff session, I will explain the questionnaire and answer any questions you have.
If you decide to stay and complete the questionnaire, I will collect a consent form from you, but will keep your participation completely confidential. Your principal will not be present and you will place your completed consent form and questionnaire in an envelope that I will seal when finished. Only I will see your individual responses or know that you participated. In order for your principal to be included in my study, I will need, at least, 50% of the teachers to participate in this activity, so I hope you will consent to do so.

After collecting the responses of the teachers who participate, I will analyze the responses for patterns that create a profile of how your principal works with the teachers in your school regarding the three areas listed above. After I create that summary profile, I will meet with your principal to debrief and reflect on what we both learn about how the teachers in your school collectively experience the principal's leadership works in the areas of interest listed above. The summary profile will be the aggregate of the feedback from teachers who participate with no information that could identify the participants.

If you are interested in learning more about this study, please contact me by replying by email to sukinahalim.alramel@wmich.edu You are also welcome to contact me by phone at (616) 635-0348. You can also attend the teacher session and ask questions at that time, before deciding to complete the questionnaire. I hope that you decide to participate, as your perspective will be helpful in completing the profile of your principal's work with teachers in the three areas listed above.

Sincerely,

Sukinah Al Ramel

Appendix C

Informed Consent—Principal Participants

Appendix C
Informed Consent Document—Principal Participants
Western Michigan University
The Department of Educational Leadership, Research and Technology

Principal Investigator: Patricia Reeves
Student Investigator: Sukinah Al Ramel
Title of Study: Principal Leadership and the Development of Teacher Professionalism and Autonomy within a Collaborative School Culture

You have been invited to participate in a research project titled "Principal Leadership and the Development of Teacher Professionalism and Autonomy within a Collaborative School Culture." This project will serve as Sukinah Al Ramel's Ph.D. Dissertation for the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology. This consent document will explain the purpose of this research project and will go over all of the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely and please ask any questions if you need more clarification.

What are we trying to find out in this study?

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to understand how elementary school principals build a collaborative school culture that develops and facilitates teacher autonomy for continuous growth and development. This study aims specifically to examine the actual activities and behaviors that elementary school principals use in schools to empower and mobilize teachers to grow professionally and independently in ways that can enhance self-direction and motivation in their growth through reflecting on their own practices, practicing authentic self-assessment, and setting their goals based on evidence of student achievement.

Who can participate in this study?

To participate in this study, you must be the principal in an elementary school where the principal agrees to participate as a case of a principal who is working with teachers to build a culture of collaboration and professionalism. Each instrumental case will be an elementary school principal serving in an elementary school in Southwest Michigan. I will recruit principals from approximately 80-95 elementary schools in 22 districts within a greater metropolitan area that contains urban, suburban, and rural or small town schools.

If you are a principal who received my recruitment communication, you must also meet the following study criteria to participate in this study:

1. You (the principal) must have completed, at least, two years as principal of your current school.
2. You must have received a year-end evaluation rating of effective or highly

effective base on the state requirements for evaluating principals in Michigan.

3. You must indicate that the following items describe your work with teachers:
    a. I engage with teachers in multiple ways to build a collaborative culture for teacher learning and growth.
    b. I encourage teachers to assess and reflect on their own practice
    c. I encourage teachers to use evidence of student learning to establish goals for their own professional growth.

Where will this study take place?
This study will take place at three elementary schools in southwest Michigan of the United States. The interviews will take place in your school at a location specified by you.

What is the time commitment for participating in this study?
The entire case study will be conducted over a two-week period between April and June 2018. The time commitment for participating in this study is 60-75 min for each school principal interview from each school and 30-45 min for the follow up principal interview. Thus, if you are a participating principal, you will be asked to participate in two interviews totaling 90-120 minutes, over a period not to exceed three weeks.

What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?
If you are a principal, you will be asked to participate in two interviews regarding your work to build teacher autonomy, collaboration and professionalism in your school. During the first interview you will be asked to describe how you build teacher autonomy, collaboration and professionalism. You will also be asked to share any documents that help the researcher get a clear picture of your strategies and activities regarding your work to develop teacher autonomy, collaboration, and professionalism.

You will also be asked to communicate with your staff about your involvement in this study and set up a voluntary staff meeting of about 30 minutes during which the researcher will ask your teachers to respond to open-ended questions to describe what strategies and actions you employ to develop their sense of autonomy and professionalism and build a collaborative culture of shared leadership.

Finally, you will be asked to participate in a 30-45 follow-up interview during which you will examine and reflect on the teacher feedback from your staff from the above referenced staff questionnaire. The focus of this interview will be to engage you in reflecting on how the teaching staff describes your work in the areas of interest to this study.

What information is being measured during the study?
The information that will be measured during the study is how elementary school principals build a collaborative school culture that develops and facilitates teacher autonomy for continuous growth and development.

This study aims specifically to examine the actual activities and behaviors that elementary school principals use in schools to empower and mobilize teachers to grow professionally and independently in ways that can enhance self-direction and motivation in their growth through reflecting on their own practices, practicing authentic self-assessment, and setting their goals based on evidence of student achievement.

What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized? There are no risks assumed in this study. Any possible risk associated with potential for breach of confidentiality will be controlled and privacy will be protected. I will take steps to reduce that risk by de-identifying all data collected and maintaining transcripts and questionnaires in de-identified electronic files stored on a password protected, encrypted electronic data storage device.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?
By conducting this qualitative study, a detailed understanding may be gained related to what individual elementary school principals do to develop the quality of teacher work within a collaborative school culture. Specifically, this study may add insight into the leadership behaviors and activities that elementary school principals use regularly to empower teachers to be more autonomous by using self-reflection, self-assessment, goal setting, self-directed growth, and self-motivation for improving their teaching and learning practices.

The results of this study may be used to inform the work of school leaders in Saudi Arabia and bring about change that can foster self-reflection and self-directed learning and growth of teachers within a culture of professional collaboration and professionalism. This study may provide insightful ideas on how school principals in Saudi system can design more effective professional learning activities for teachers that includes developing and participating in PLCs, collaborative team teaching, and the observation and feedback. This study may add to the body of literature, and inform the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia and other school administrators of the beneficial strategies they can use during professional development and coaching to improve the leadership practices of school principals as well as teacher quality.

Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?
There will be no cost associated with my study. The only cost anticipated is the dedication of the participants' time and efforts.

Is there any compensation for participating in this study?
There is no compensation for participating in this study.

Who will have access to the information collected during this study?
The investigators will have sole access to the interview data collected in this study, only. All interview and questionnaire data will be de-identified to protect confidentiality and

maintained on a password protected encrypted electronic storage device until the completion of the study.

What if you want to stop participating in this study?
Accomplishing this study successfully mostly depend on the participants in this study. Although we hope you will participate in this study, you may choose to stop participating in the study at anytime for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop your participation. You will experience NO consequences either academically or personally if you choose to withdraw from this study. The investigator can also decide to stop your participation in the study without your consent.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the primary investigator, Sukinah Al Ramel at 616-635-0348 or sukinahalim.alramel@wmich.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.

_____

Please Print Your Name

_____

_____

Participant's signature

Appendix D

Informed Consent—Teacher Participants

Appendix D
Informed Consent Document —Teacher Participants
Western Michigan University
The Department of Educational Leadership, Research and Technology

Principal Investigator: Patricia Reeves
Student Investigator: Sukinah Al Ramel
Title of Study: Principal Leadership and the Development of Teacher Professionalism and Autonomy within a Collaborative School Culture

You have been invited to participate in a research project titled "Principal Leadership and the Development of Teacher Professionalism and Autonomy within a Collaborative School Culture." This project will serve as Sukinah Al Ramel's Ph.D. Dissertation for the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology. This consent document will explain the purpose of this research project and will go over all of the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely and please ask any questions if you need more clarification.

What are we trying to find out in this study?
The purpose of this qualitative research study is to understand how elementary school principals build a collaborative school culture that develops and facilitates teacher autonomy for continuous growth and development. This study aims specifically to examine the actual activities and behaviors that elementary school principals use in schools to empower and mobilize teachers to grow professionally and independently in ways that can enhance self-direction and motivation in their growth through reflecting on their own practices, practicing authentic self-assessment, and setting their goals based on evidence of student achievement.

Who can participate in this study?
To participate in this study, you must be a teacher in an elementary school where your principal works with you to build a culture of collaboration and professionalism. This study will involve three instrumental cases where each instrumental case will be an elementary school principal serving in an elementary school in Southwest Michigan. Your principal has agreed to participate in this study.

If you are a teacher of other professionally certified educator who works, at least, half-time in the school of a participating principal, you may participate in the teacher portion of this study by participating in one staff session, during which, I will present an open-ended questionnaire to learn about the work your principal does to build collaboration, autonomy, and share leadership in your school.

Where will this study take place?
This study will take place at three elementary schools in southwest Michigan of the United States. Completing the questionnaire will take place in your school at staff meeting.

What is the time commitment for participating in this study?
You will be asked to complete one open-ended questionnaire of 20 minutes during a staff meeting.

What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?
If you decide to participate you will be asked to participate in a 20-minute activity for completing one open-ended questionnaire where you will list strategies and activities that your principal has used in the last two years for building a collaborative culture that supports your learning and growth.

What information is being measured during the study?
The information that will be measured during the study is how elementary school principals build a collaborative school culture that develops and facilitates teacher autonomy for continuous growth and development. This study aims specifically to examine the actual activities and behaviors that elementary school principals use in schools to empower and mobilize teachers to grow professionally and independently in ways that can enhance self-direction and motivation in their growth (autonomy) through reflecting on their own practices, practicing authentic self-assessment, and setting their goals based on evidence of student achievement.

What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized? There are no risks assumed in this study. Any possible risk associated with potential for breach of confidentiality will be controlled and privacy will be protected. I will take steps to reduce that risk by de-identifying all data collected and maintaining transcripts and questionnaires in de-identified electronic files stored on a password protected, encrypted electronic data storage device.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?
By conducting this qualitative study, a detailed understanding may be gained related to what individual elementary school principals do to develop the quality of teacher work within a collaborative school culture. Specifically, this study may add insight into the leadership behaviors and activities that elementary school principals use regularly to empower teachers to be more autonomous by using self-reflection, self-assessment, goal setting, self-directed growth, and self-motivation for improving their teaching and learning practices.

The results of this study may be used to inform the work of school leaders in Saudi Arabia and bring about change that can foster self-reflection and self-directed learning and growth of teachers within a culture of professional collaboration and professionalism. This

study may provide insightful ideas on how school principals in Saudi system can design more effective professional learning activities for teachers that includes developing and participating in PLCs, collaborative team teaching, and the observation and feedback. This study may add to the body of literature, and inform the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia and other school administrators of the beneficial strategies they can use during professional development and coaching to improve the leadership practices of school principals as well as teacher quality.

Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?
There will be no cost associated with the participating in this study. The only cost anticipated is the dedication of the participants' time and efforts.

Is there any compensation for participating in this study?
There is no compensation for participating in this study.

Who will have access to the information collected during this study?
The investigators will have sole access to the interview data collected in this study, only. All interview and questionnaire data will be de-identified to protect confidentiality and maintained on a password protected encrypted electronic storage device until the completion of the study.

What if you want to stop participating in this study?
Accomplishing this study successfully mostly depend on the participants in this study. Although we hope you will participate in this study, you may choose to stop participating in the study at anytime for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop your participation. You will experience NO consequences either academically or personally if you choose to withdraw from this study. The investigator can also decide to stop your participation in the study without your consent.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the primary investigator, Sukinah Al Ramel at 616-635-0348 or sukinahalim.alramel@wmich.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.

Please Print Your Name

_____

_____

Participant's signature

Appendix E

Principal Initial Interview Protocol

Appendix E

Principal Initial Interview Protocol

Date: _____
School: _____

Location of interview: _____ Name of Interviewee: _____

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview and taking time to meet with me today for this research project. This interview should take between 60 and 75 minutes to discuss how you contribute to building a collaborative school culture that empowers teachers to be more autonomous in their self-assessment, reflective practices, self-directed growth, and motivation for continuous learning and growth. With your agreement, the interview will be audio-recorded to increase the accuracy of your responses. The confidentiality of all the interview responses will be maintained by replacing all personal identifying information with codes and pseudonyms during transcribing the data and then emailing an electronic copy of your transcribed data. You may ask to stop recording at any time during the interview. Do you have any questions before we begin? May I start recording now?" Great! Let's begin

1. **Creating a collaborative school culture that supports professional learning and development of teachers.**

    a) Please, briefly describe your goals and expectations for the school.

    b) What have you found to be the three most important things you do that supports your staff's professional development that improves student growth?

    c) How do you develop shared language and common understandings for your teachers' work? How does this include conversations when discussing issues related to teaching that improves student learning?

    d) Please describe some of the professional learning activities you have provided your teachers in the last couple years.

    e) How have you provided teachers with opportunities to develop and lead professional learning activities?

    f) What types of opportunities do you provide for peer observation and feedback?

        - How has providing these opportunities enabled teachers to share their practices with other teachers?

- How do you feel this has built a sense of collaboration among your teachers and support staff? Can you give specific examples?

- In what ways do you feel this has improved the motivation of your teachers and instructional staff? Can you give some specific examples?

g) How did these professional learning activities encourage teachers to conference with one another around issues of teaching and learning as a form of professional development? Can you give some specific examples?

h) What are some changes you have seen teachers make in their teaching practices as a result of the professional development and collaborative learning activities?

i) In what ways do you, as principal, try to develop a school culture that builds trust and promotes continuous growth and improvement for teachers?

2. **Enhancing the thoughtful and reflective practices of teachers to enable them to grow professionally.**

a) How would you describe a reflective teacher?

b) In what ways do you promote the reflective practices of teachers at your school?

c) Please describe a reflective conversation you had with a teacher, or teachers, where you had difficult conversations, what happened?

d) What are some ways you have dealt with these difficult situations, and how did you find solutions?

e) How has reflective conversation improved teaching performance? Can you give a specific example?

f) When you think of your school environment, what, if anything, do you think encourages teachers to be reflective or prevents them from being reflective?

g) What more would you want to do to enhance the thoughtful and reflective practices of teachers?

3. **Fostering authentic self-assessment among teachers.**

a) What teacher evaluation system did your district adopt and why did you select it?

b) I have read about ways of doing teacher evaluations that includes reflective practices. Would you describe the steps you use to conduct teacher evaluations?

(pre-observation activities and pre-observation meeting; observation; teacher

reflection = self-assessment & principal reflection; post meeting = shared information from reflections; next steps – goal setting, coaching/mentoring, workshops)

c) Would you give specific examples of how you use the evaluation system to enhance authentic self-assessment among teachers?

d) How do you help teachers feel safe and comfortable when they share honest self-assessment?

e) How do you help teachers use evidence of student learning for their self-assessment? What types of student evidence do you expect teachers to share?

f) How do you provide teachers with feedback concerning their performance assessment or teacher observations? What different methods of follow-up do you include in the teacher evaluation process?

(Peer coaching/mentoring, online workshops, classes, …)

g) How have you used peer observations and feedback as part of the teacher evaluation process? Can you give specific examples of how peer feedback has been helpful, or not helpful, in the teacher reflection process to foster self-assessment? (Trust)

4. **Encouraging teachers to use evidence-based goal setting for developing and refining teaching practice.**

a) Please describe the process that teachers follow to set their goals?

b) How do you encourage teachers to set goals for improving their instructional practices for personal growth?

c) How do you help teachers track their progress toward attaining their goals and assist them in making adjustments to goals based on data and evidence collected?

5. **Fostering motivation for teachers for continuous learning and growth in their practice.**

a) How do you motivate teachers so they take ownership (autonomy) of their continuous learning and grow? Please give me specific examples.

b) How do you encourage teachers to support each other's learning and professional growth? Please give me specific examples.

6. **Wrap-up**

a) What things contribute to your ability to foster a professional learning environment that promotes continuous learning and growth for your teachers in a way that enhances staff collaboration and teacher autonomy? What detracts from your ability to develop a culture that promotes continuous professional development, staff collaboration and/or teacher autonomy?

b) Is there anything else you would like to add?

Interpreting Principal Provided Documents

- Please walk me through the documents of your work that you are providing me as examples.
- For each, please explain what the document or artifact is about and how it relates to how you develop the following:
    - Teacher autonomy
    - Teacher reflective practice
    - Teacher self-assessment
    - Teacher collaboration
    - Teacher motivation for continuous learning and growth
    - Evidence-based goal setting by teachers

Thank you for participating in this interview. All the information collected from you is confidential. Your name will not appear on any document in which this information is recorded. If necessary, may I contact you for a follow up interview or to clarify some of your responses? I will also provide you an opportunity to review the transcript of your interview and add to or clarify the information you shared with me today.

(**Turn off audio recorder)**

Appendix F

Teacher Questionnaire

Appendix F

Teacher Questionnaire

Thank you for agreeing to participate in teacher questionnaire for this research project. The aim of this activity is to find out how your school principal contributes to building a collaborative school culture that empowers you to be more autonomous in your self-assessment, reflective practices, self-directed growth, and motivation for continuous learning and growth.

Please write down a list of the things your principal has done in the last two years to encourage teachers in the school to:

- Assess and reflect on our teaching practice.
- Use student results and other evidence to develop personal learning goals.
- Use our teacher evaluation system to develop personal growth plans.
- Stay motivated to learn and grow our practice.
- Learn from and with each other
- Work together to solve instructional challenges and try new ideas to improve student learning.

Appendix G

Principal Follow-up Interview Protocol

Appendix G

Principal Follow-up Interview Protocol

Date: _____ School: _____

Location of interview: _____ Name of Interviewee: _____

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this second interview, which should take between 30 and 45 minutes. With your agreement, the interview will be audio-recorded to increase the accuracy of your responses. The confidentiality of all the interview responses will be maintained by replacing all personal identifying information with codes and pseudonyms during transcribing the data and then emailing an electronic copy of your transcribed data. You may ask to stop recording at any time during the interview. Do you have any questions before we begin? May I start recording now?" Great! Let's begin

Teacher Professionalism and Autonomy

1. What are the professional practices that you want teachers to have?
2. How do you support teachers in building professional practices? Can you give specific examples?
3. One way to build the professional practices in the school is through developing a self- improvident plan. How do you help or support teacher in developing a self-improvement plan? Can you give specific examples?
4. When I say teacher autonomy, what does that mean to you?
5. In what ways are teachers enabled in making their own choices in PD activities?
6. How do you help build teacher autonomy?
7. How do you see teacher professionalism and teacher autonomy blending together to help students and the school community? Can you give specific example?
8. What shared language does your teachers use now that they did not used several years ago?

9. How does this come from your professional development?
10. How do you think that your role as principal has changed in the area of evaluating teachers?
11. You explain how you give teachers the trust to try something new. Can you give an example when a teacher tried something new. Did it lead to more teacher conversations something that you just wanting to use.
12. How do you think that your role of principal has changed in the last 10 years with the vision to share leadership in schools and developing teacher professionalism and autonomy?
13. Last question how do you feel that the focus on teacher professionalism and autonomy has changed teachers and the developing of teacher leaders?

Thank you for your time and this has concluded our second interview. Note: I conducted an informal follow-up interview to ask each principal additional questions where clarification was needed.

Appendix H

HSIRB Approval Letter

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Institutional Review Board
FWA00007042
IRB00000254

Date: April 3, 2018

To: Patricia Reeves, Principal Investigator
Sukinah Al Ramel, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Daryle Gardner-Bonneau, Ph.D., Vice Chair Daryle J. Gardner-Bonneau

Re: HSIRB Project Number 18-03-15

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled "Principal Leadership and the Development of Teacher Professionalism and Autonomy within a Collaborative School Culture" has been **approved** under the **expedited** category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may **only** be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project (e.g., ***you must request a post approval change to enroll subjects beyond the number stated in your application under "Number of subjects you want to complete the study***)." Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

Reapproval of the project is required if it extends beyond the termination date stated below.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: **April 2, 2019**

Office of the Vice President for Research
Research Compliance Office
1903 W. Michigan Ave., Kalamazoo, MI 49008-5456
PHONE: (269) 387-8293 FAX: (269) 387-8276
WEBSITE: wmich.edu/research/compliance/hsirb

CAMPUS SITE: 251 W. Walwood Hall