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Teachers' Perceptions Of Professional Development In Urban And Rural Schools In North Dakota

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TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN URBAN
AND RURAL SCHOOLS IN NORTH DAKOTA

By

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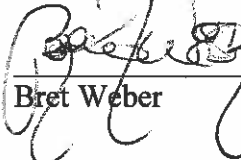
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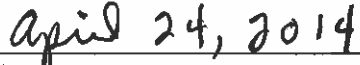
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This dissertation is being submitted by the appointed advisory committee as having met all of the requirements of the School of Graduate Studies at the University of North Dakota and is hereby approved.

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ABSTRACT

Within the past decade, the North Dakota legislature and state government officials have taken steps to ensure equity in education between urban and rural schools, addressing funding issues and the implementation of regional education associations. This research investigated those efforts by examining professional development as one indicator of equity. This research focused on three research questions: 1. What are the teachers' perceptions of professional development in urban schools in North Dakota? 2. What are the teachers' perceptions of professional development in rural schools in North Dakota? 3. What issues of equity exist as they relate to professional development in urban and rural schools? Using a phenomenological research design, four secondary urban teachers and four secondary rural teachers were interviewed. The faculty members of both the urban and the rural schools participated in a Likert-style survey. The qualitative and the quantitative data together indicated that little difference existed between the perceptions of the urban teachers and the perceptions of the rural teachers as they pertain to professional development in their schools. Using a t-test for independent samples, no statistically significant differences existed between the responses of the urban teachers and the responses of the rural teachers regarding their perceptions of the provided professional development. Recommendations for school administrators and teachers are included, as well as discussion of the Experiential Learning theoretical framework.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to describe selected teachers' perceptions of the state of professional development in both urban and rural schools across the state of North Dakota to ascertain if the targeted legislation meant to improve academic achievement of all students and provide equity in educational opportunity has impacted teacher professional development, an important link in the chain of improved teaching and learning.

Urban And Rural

The 2010 Census classified "urban areas" as those cities with at least 50,000 in human population (U.S. Census, 2010b). Every other locale that does meet that standard in terms of number of residents is considered "rural." In North Dakota, only Bismarck, Fargo, and Grand Forks are consequently labeled as urban (U.S. Census, 2010a). Some might argue that the fourth largest city in the state, Minot, is also urban. However, the 2010 census figures do not support this assertion (U.S. Census, 2010a).

There are 169 high schools, public and private, of varying sizes, in North Dakota (North Dakota High School Activity Association [NDHSAA], 2011). Feeding each of those high schools are elementary and middle schools. As with the population of the town, so goes the population of the school. Those public schools in urban areas tend to have large student populations and larger numbers of faculty. Those public schools in rural areas have smaller student populations and fewer faculty members.

Equity Lawsuit and Legislation

Equity in education has been a concern across North Dakota for at least a decade. In October of 2003 eight school districts, as well as parents and students in each district, filed a lawsuit to challenge the method used to finance the state's K-12 educational system (Wetzel, 2003). Two months later the lawsuit was modified when another school district joined the action, bringing the total number of school districts to nine (North Dakota Commission on Education Improvement [ND CEI], 2010). The school districts were prepared to argue that the funding methodology "violates the state constitution by shortchanging classrooms and promoting huge differences in local property taxes" (Wetzel, 2003, p. 1). Furthermore, the lawsuit argued that "North Dakota's finance system relies too heavily on property taxes, and that property tax resources are unequally distributed among districts" (Wetzel, 2003, p. 1). Because of this, "some North Dakota students are deprived of the course offerings that others enjoy…Some schools cannot even by the textbooks, equipment and supplies they need" (Wetzel, 2003, p.1).

The nine school districts involved in the lawsuit were Williston, Grafton, Devils Lake, Surrey, Larimore, Hatton, Thompson, Des Lacs-Burlington, and Valley City (Kincaid, 2007). All of the communities served by these school districts were rural (U.S. Census, 2010a).

On January 10, 2006, the nine school districts agreed to a stay of the lawsuit to give the North Dakota legislature the opportunity to rectify the perceived problems in equitable K-12 education funding (ND CEI, 2010). The stay agreement included the requirement that the governor of the state, via executive order, establish a commission to recommend "ways to improve the current system of delivering and financing elementary

and secondary education, including the equitable distribution of state education dollars"
(ND CEI, 2010, p. 1).

Working to address the financing issues raised by the school districts, legislators
grappled with many factors, finally agreeing to a bill that one representative said
"increases equity" (Rivoli, 2007, p. A1). A state senator at the time said that he thought
"it will help ensure that all students have a more uniform level of educational
opportunity" (Rivoli, 2007, p. A1). Senate Bill 2200 was passed in 2007 by the 60th
Legislative Assembly, which addressed many of the claims of the lawsuit. Furthermore,
the work of the commission continued and a second report "provided the basis for House
Bill 1400 which was passed by the 61st Legislative Assembly" in 2009 (ND CEI, 2010, p.
2).

By the end of the 61st Legislative Assembly in 2009, the claims of the original
lawsuit were addressed in total, but the work of the commission continued, "charged with
examining equity and adequacy in school finance, graduation and curricular standards,
seamless transition from high school to college, student performance measures, and the
quality of instruction" (ND CEI, 2010, p. 2). If the claims of the original lawsuit were, at
this point, addressed in total, it could be assumed that schools and school districts, both
urban and rural, were now able to provide an equitable education for their students since
there was equity in financing, providing, and assessing education across the state of
North Dakota. This would mean that even the smallest rural school in the most rural part
of the state would have "the course offerings that others enjoy" (Wetzel, 2003, p.1). All
schools and school districts no matter their size or location would be able to provide
"textbooks, equipment and supplies they need" (Wetzel, 2003, p.1). Furthermore, it could

be concluded that "all students have a more uniform level of educational opportunity" (Rivoli, 2007, p. A1) no matter their location in the state or the population density of the area in which they lived.

<div align="center">Regional Education Associations</div>

Almost simultaneously with the initiation, stay, and settlement of the lawsuit brought by the nine rural school districts, North Dakota was seeing regional education associations evolving to become part of the public education scene in this state. Once called cooperatives or educational joint powers agreements, nearly every public school and school district in the state of North Dakota today belongs to a regional education association. Therefore, nearly every public school student, whether in rural or urban areas, receives services from a regional education association.

The associations originally began in southwestern North Dakota when the superintendents of five school districts lamented declining school populations and what that meant for teacher salaries, course offerings, and other issues. From such conversations a service-sharing model was developed in which the five school districts agreed to collaborate and jointly fund services that alone each district would be unable to offer. Richardton-Taylor, Dickinson, South Heart, Bellfield, and Kildeer signed an agreement to become the Roughrider Education Services Program. Since then, thirteen other school districts have joined the original five (Dooley, 2004). All of the original school districts service rural areas and communities as defined by the census (U.S. Census, 2010b).

School districts were, because of such regional education associations, together able to offer testing services and professional development, secure grants, and hire extra

faculty and staff to provide curriculum and staff development support while still maintaining district autonomy (Dooley, 2004). Then Lt. Governor Jack Dalrymple said, "This fills a gap we haven't been able to fill before" (Dooley, 2005, p. 1). Teachers seemed to appreciate the networking capabilities as well. Holly Holinka, English teacher in South Heart, said, "It unites small schools, and you're not out there by yourself. In the large schools you have that network already" (Dooley, 2005, p. 1).

Regional education associations are now a common part of the educational landscape in North Dakota. The North Dakota Century Code is the written compilation of state laws. The Century Code now addresses the associations, their organization, their required size, their funding, their responsibilities in terms of special education, and the services that associations are required to provide. In order to receive state funding, Regional education associations were now required to offer a) professional development for teachers and administrators, b) technology support services, c) support for reaching school improvement goals, d) assistance in translating and using student achievement data, and e) more and better extra-curricular offerings (North Dakota Century Code [NDCC], Chapter 15.1-09.1, "Regional education associations"). Because of regional education associations, rural schools and school districts are given the opportunity to provide a high-level of services that they would not be able to afford on their own, including professional development for teachers, as stated in the legislation addressing regional education associations.

<div align="center">After the Legislation</div>

In theory, the legislation introduced and passed by the North Dakota Legislature during the 2007 and 2009 legislative sessions should insure that every child in North

Dakota receives an education equal in every way with every other student in the state. With new funding formulas, the amount schools could spend on the education of the students in their purview was supposedly equal in terms of per-pupil spending. Furthermore, schools now had the ability to link together in regional educational associations, sharing resources to improve the overall instructional program of the cooperating schools. Therefore, theoretically, every student should be the recipient of a high quality education, resulting in similar educational gains no matter the school or school district, no matter if urban or rural, no matter if large or small.

Two important considerations must be noted as a foundation to this research. First, research again and again supports the notion that the teacher in the K-12 classroom is the main determinant of the academic success of the students (e.g., Harris & Sass, 2011; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997). In other words, the quality of the teachers in classrooms is integral to the quality of instruction. Another important consideration is that the multitude of research has indicated that quality professional development can impact teachers' practices (e.g., Dingle, Brownell, Leko, Boardman, & Haager, 2011) and, consequently, the academic achievement of the students in the classroom (Barrett, Butler, & Toma, 2013; Harris & Sass, 2011).

However, the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (ND DPI, 2011) authored and released a document entitled "North Dakota Professional Development Report." In it, a survey of teachers across North Dakota was presented. The teachers were asked, "In your view, how effective is the present professional development in your school/district in impacting student performance?" (ND DPI, 2011, p.10). The respondents were asked to answer on a modified Lickert scale, from "4 Very Effective"

to "1 Not Effective" (ND DPI, 2011, p.10). Nearly 48% of the teachers who responded did so with a "2," one step above "1 - Not effective" (ND DPI, 2011, p.10). It is evident that large numbers of teachers from across the state were not, by and large, seeing much value in the professional development provided to them. The study and subsequent analysis did not identify demographic information of the 48% of teachers who indicated displeasure with professional development and its impact on student performance. It is, for example, unclear if those teachers were primarily urban or rural, or the percentage of those two categories.

Nowhere in the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction literature exists documentation of comparison of or analysis of professional development in rural and urban schools. Because of the legislation that was to provide equity in education and that allowed nearly all school districts to provide services otherwise impossible, all schools, large and small, urban and rural, could be providing professional development that impacts teachers in classrooms and student achievement ultimately. If schools were being funded equitably, and if schools had the opportunity to pool resources via regional education associations, high quality professional development for teachers could be provided no matter the size, location, or classification of the school.

The Need for this Study

Whereas professional development plays an important part in the changeability of beliefs and practices of teachers, effective professional development for teachers is essential to raising and maintaining high academic achievement for students. The state of North Dakota has collectively indicated that well-developed teachers and high academic achievement of students are important no matter the rural or urban setting. There is a

need, therefore, to determine if those goals towards equity are being met. It is paramount to determine what professional development is being provided in urban settings, as well as rural settings. Also paramount is an understanding whether teachers perceive that they are experiencing high quality professional development. Essentially, are the goals of the state of North Dakota being met as indicated by the quality of the professional development experiences for teachers?

Research Purposes

The purpose of this study is to describe selected teachers' perceptions of the state of professional development in both urban and rural schools across the state of North Dakota to ascertain if the targeted legislation meant to improve academic achievement of all students and provide equity in educational opportunity has impacted teacher professional development, an important link in the chain of improved student achievement.

Research Questions

1. What are the teachers' perceptions of professional development in urban schools in North Dakota?

2. What are the teachers' perceptions of professional development in rural schools in North Dakota?

3. What issues of equity exist as they relate to professional development in urban and rural schools?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework through which the results of this research will be viewed is Experiential Learning as espoused by David Kolb. Experiential Learning, as

detailed in Kolb's seminal and critical work *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development,* is based on the works of Kurt Lewin, John Dewey, and Jean Piaget (Kolb, 1984). There are six characteristics of Experiential Learning identified by Kolb:

1. Learning is a process, not a product. Ideas are not unchanging, but, instead, ideas are shaped and formed through experiences.

2. Learning is an ongoing, unending experiential process. Learning is not the process of inscribing on a blank slate at one point in time; learning is a continuous process of adding to and reworking the knowledge that already exists through experience.

3. Learning requires adaptation to varying, opposing modes of learning. Learning requires four modes or abilities: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, active experimentation.

4. Learning is a process of adapting to the world. Learning is the primary adaptive process of humans and therefore incorporates all human functions to accomplish adaptation.

5. Transactions with the environment are instrumental in learning. This transactional nature is such that the individual and the environment interact and are both changed by the process.

6. Learning is knowledge creation. (Kolb, 1984)

In a very practical way for classroom teachers, professional development grounded in Experiential Learning is a cycle of goal setting and teacher planning, practice, and reflection. Bruce, Esmonde, Ross, Dookie, and Beatty (2010) explained professional development with an Experiential Learning foundation in this way:

...the whole social context of the classroom becomes the primary and legitimate

site of teacher professional learning on an ongoing basis. We were interested in

understanding PL <professional learning> opportunities that were clearly

grounded in classroom practice using iterative cycles of teacher planning,

practice, and reflection. (p. 1599)

Looking at rural and urban schools in North Dakota, and the professional development

provided to teachers in those schools, this research analyzed professional development in

relation to Experiential Learning. That is, the data gleaned from this research will be

viewed in part through a lens of Experiential Learning, identifying those aspects of

professional development that utilize the Experiential Learning cycle, as part of the larger

dissemination of the data of this research.

Summary

This chapter described the manner in which the education stakeholders in North

Dakota impacted legislation ultimately passed by the legislature in an attempt to provide

equity to all schools. Both funding issues and regional education associations were

addressed as a means to provide equity. Whereas student achievement is linked to the

professional development provided to teachers, professional development is an important

factor of the evidence of equity. No state government assessment of professional

development in terms of equity has been completed or presented. The next chapter in this

research is a review of the scholarly and professional literature on the subject of

professional development, including a discussion of equity issues present in professional

development in rural and urban areas. Chapter three addresses the methodology used in

completing this study. Chapter four reports the data gleaned from the research. Chapter

five offers discussion, conclusions, recommendations, and limitations of this research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The scholarly literature addressing professional development is abundant. What follows is a synthesis of the literature regarding professional development generally, what research has identified as effective professional development for teachers, two current best practices in the practical application of professional development, and a discussion regarding rural schools and their ability to provide quality professional development for their teachers.

Professional Development

Every K-12 teacher in the United States is familiar with professional development to the extent that every state in the union requires continuing education of some kind, at some level, in some form. The state of North Dakota is no different in that most teachers' license renewals are dependent on receiving additional training (North Dakota Education Standards and Practices Board [ND ESPB], n.d.).

Professional development has come to the forefront in recent years as educators and researchers and others recognize that the ultimate purpose of professional development is the improved academic achievement of students. As stated in chapter one, professional development can impact teachers' beliefs and practices (Dingle, Brownell, Leko, Boardman, & Haager, 2011). Undergirding this is the supposition that teachers – their planning, dispositions, and instructional strategies – are the main impetus for greater academic achievement (Harris & Sass, 2011; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997). Effective

professional development, therefore, holds great promise for schools and the academic growth of their students.

Opfer and Pedder (2011) stated it in this way: "If student learning is to be improved, then one pathway for doing so is the provision of more effective professional learning activities for teachers in schools; where 'effective' activities result in positive change for teachers and their pupils" (p. 3). McCutchen et al. (2002) suggested a pathway of improved academic achievement that begins with the teacher learning about a topic, continues with change in teacher practices, and results in teacher practice that can "improve student learning" (p. 80). Effective professional development can produce long-lasting consequences for the teacher and the students in his/her purview (Tournaki, Lyublinskaya, & Carolan, 2011).

<div align="center">Professional Development Organizations</div>

Organizations for professional development have been a relatively recent development. In fact, as recently as 1969 a group of educators met in Minneapolis, Minnesota, to discuss and commence the inception of the National Staff Development Council (Learning Forward, 2012). At that time, the council focused on concepts such as differentiating professional development to an individual level, administrator professional development, paying for professional development, and evaluation of programs, among others. That National Staff Development Council continued to grow, and in 2010 changed its name to Learning Forward. With the new name the recognition of a "growing international presence, a stronger focus on educator learning to support students learning, and the increasing influence of the association" (Learning Forward, 2012). Learning Forward writes and promotes standards related to professional development of teachers.

Additionally, other national and international organizations exist that target professional development as part of their mission. Together they influence the professional development landscape for teachers in the United States. Such organizations include the Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) and subject-area specific organizations such as the National Council of the Teachers of English (NCTE), the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), and the International Reading Association (IRA), to name a few. Furthermore, organizations that advocate on behalf of teachers (i.e., "unions") often influence professional development for teachers at both a national and a statewide/local level.

Effective Professional Development

As every teacher participates in professional development, every teacher also recognizes that some development is effective and some is less than effective. If teachers are engaged in ineffective professional development, it follows that in theory, the impact on students would also be less than optimal. The scholarly and professional literature provides characteristics of what constitutes effective professional development. According to Garet et al. (2001), those characteristics are: 1) sustained over time, 2) provide opportunities for active learning, 3) add to the current instructional program, 4) provide opportunities for practice during a teacher's day, 5) provide opportunities for collaborating with colleagues.

Learning Forward, formerly the National Staff Development Council, created a list of seven standards that also describe effective professional development in general ways. In introducing these standards, Learning Forward (2011) stated, "The standards make explicit that the purpose of professional learning is for educators to develop the

knowledge, skill, practices, and dispositions they need to help students perform at higher levels" (p.14). These standards are: learning communities, leadership, resources, data, learning designs, implementation, and outcomes (Learning Forward, 2012). There is substantial overlap between what the scholarly literature said regarding effective professional development for teachers and the standards delineated by Learning Forward.

In terms of seminal research in this field, it is important to note that Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, and Yoon (2001) conducted research that partially culminated in the article "What Makes Professional Development Effective? Results from a National Sample of Teachers." The number of teachers surveyed and the wide swath regarding professional development addressed in their research and work made it valuable to many. This research and article is cited innumerable times and in varied places. It is a seminal and critical work in the literature regarding professional development, and one on which much of this section of the review of the literature rests.

Sustained Over Time

Teachers often attend one-day inservices with no follow-up or continuity beyond that one day. Despite the fact that such professional development is often used by schools and school districts around the country, it is not effective (Tournaki et al., 2011). In fact, the literature not only supports a professional development model that is sustained over time (Garet et al., 2001; McCutchen et al., 2002; Tournaki et al., 2011), the literature also addresses the length necessary to be deemed effective. Tournaki et al. (2011), in discussing their research, stated, "The study results reinforce the under-appreciated notion that professional development needs to be ongoing and last, perhaps, as long as 2-3 years in order to begin getting returns on its investment" (p. 311).

At other points those same authors argued for professional development activities that are linked, not simply for a year or two or three, but for the entire career of teachers. They stated, "This speaks to the pressing need for professional development activities to be sustained and ongoing, not only throughout the school year, but also across one's career" (Tournaki et al., 2011, p. 310). Effective professional development is sustained over long periods of time.

Garet et al. (2001) stated that a longer duration of professional development is foundational to other factors of effective continuing education of teachers. That is, if professional development activities are lengthy, chances are there will be more opportunities for active learning. If there are professional development activities sustained over time, those same activities are more likely to form or add to the current instructional program (Garet et al., 2001).

Learning Forward (2011) reiterated the effectiveness of long-term professional development with its standard "Implementation," which detailed the overall purpose of professional development: teacher change and improved student learning. When implementing professional development, this standard indicated that those purposes required professional development sustained over time. Teacher change and improved student learning are not likely to result from a single session (Learning Forward, 2011).

Opportunities for Active Learning

Garet et al. (2001) recommended that professional development for teachers should be active in nature. Using this term, they referred to four foci of active learning: "observing and being observed teaching; planning for classroom implementation; reviewing student work; and presenting, leading, and writing" (p. 925). Many, if not all,

of the standards created by Learning Forward (formerly the National Staff Development Council) promote active learning as the means to effective professional development. In fact, as part of the definition and description of the standard "Learning Designs," Learning Forward (2011) referred to job-imbedded professional development and stated:

> Job-embedded learning designs engage individuals, pairs, or teams of educators in professional learning during the workday. Designs for job-embedded learning include analyzing student data, case studies, peer observation or visitations, simulations, co-teaching with peers or specialists, action research, peer and expert coaching, observing and analyzing demonstrations of practice, problem-based learning, inquiry into practice, student observation, study groups, data analysis, constructing and scoring assessments, examining student or educator work, lesson study, video clubs, professional reading, or book studies. (p. 41)

The one-day inservice discussed by Tournaki et al. (2011) provided in schools across the nation is often a passive activity in which an expert in education arrives and presents, with no real opportunity for active learning as defined by Garet et al. (2001). As previously stated, duration of time seemingly plays a part in the amount of active learning that can be present in professional development activities.

Opfer and Pedder (2011), using the definition from Garet et al. (2001), stated that teachers from high performing schools receive professional development that is often active in nature, in which opportunities are provided for active learning. These authors also concluded that teachers from the lowest performing schools receive professional development that is passive in nature. One obvious implication is that, as documented earlier, teachers and students can be impacted by professional development. High

performing schools have provided the most effective professional development that is active and requires a certain engagement on the part of teachers; low performing schools provide less active professional development. Therefore, effective active professional development contributes to successful schools, or so the implication follows.

Supports Current Instructional Program

Professional development for teachers should be based on the needs of the teachers themselves (Mitchem, Wells, & Wells, 2003; Pegg, & Panizzon, 2011; Tournaki et al., 2011). As such, teachers desire professional development that instructs in practices that can be incorporated into their current practice (McCutchen et al., 2002). Effective professional development is that which adds to what teachers already know and do, to what teachers have learned in the past, to theoretically what is currently happening in classrooms. As Learning Forward (2011) stated, "A comprehensive understanding of educator learning needs is essential to planning meaningful professional learning." Professional development sessions that provide isolated content apart and away from needs of teachers, apart from practices in the classroom, and that are shorter, more random and isolated in the context of earlier teacher learning are thought to be less effective (Garet et al., 2001; Sinclair, Naizer, & Ledbetter, 2011). Furthermore, Knapp (1997) stated that professional education should accumulate over time and build on the foundation that exists from earlier professional learning. That accumulation of professional learning is what will "ultimately nudge practice in the desired direction" (Knapp, 1997, p. 259).

Opportunities For Practice

Directly tied to other characteristics of effective professional development, opportunities for practice relate to the sustained nature, the active learning, and the extent to which professional development is adding to the current instruction program. Tournaki et al. (2011) promoted professional development that addresses subject area content and the ways in which K-12 students learn that content. Their research touted an example relating to questioning techniques learned during professional development activities; after learning more effective questioning strategies to be used instead of merely lecturing, the teachers returned to their classroom to practice what had been learned. The literature suggests that that opportunity to practice what was learned is optimal.

Inherent in this is a sense that the professional development must be sustained over time to allow for practice, further instruction, and ongoing practice. Such a system of professional development allows for opportunities for observing teaching that highlights the instructional technique recently learned, as well as being observed teaching. Additionally, the questioning techniques contributed to what was ongoing in the classroom; it was a recommended improvement to what was happening (Tournaki et al., 2011). Garet et al. (2001) stated it in this manner: "…activities that extend over time are more likely to allow teachers to try out new practice in the classroom and obtain feedback on their teaching" (p. 922). Learning Forward (2011) stated, "At the classroom level, teachers use student data to assess the effectiveness of the application of their new learning" (p. 37), emphasizing that professional development should include opportunities for teachers to take what they learn and apply it in their own classroom with their own students.

Opportunities For Collaboration

Effective professional development allows opportunities for collaboration among teachers (McCutchen et al., 2002; Sinclair et al., 2011; Tournaki et al., 2011). In fact, Garet et al. (2001) recommended providing simultaneous professional development for teachers from the same school for this exact reason: so that collaboration can occur. Their article reported four primary benefits of including teachers from the same school in the same professional development. First, those teachers have the opportunities to talk about the learning that occurred during the session(s). Secondly, teachers are able to share materials, curriculum, assessments, etc., amongst themselves. Thirdly, the possibility exists to discuss shared students in relation to the learning that has occurred. Fourth, it assists in maintaining ongoing programs at the school in that when teachers leave, new teachers are brought into the ongoing professional development and curricular goals (Garet et al., 2001).

Opfer and Pedder (2011) stated that effective schools allow collaboration among and between faculty members as part of the professional development program. Less effective professional development sessions do not provide such opportunities. The authors' earlier implication regarding active learning applies to collaboration as well; that is, it is assumed that schools are effective because their teachers are provided professional development that includes bountiful collaboration instances. Underlying this assumption is a recognition that professional development holds the promise of impacting teacher practice and, ultimately, improving student achievement (Dingle, Brownell, Leko, Boardman, & Haager, 2011). Learning Forward (2011) asserted the following regarding

collaborative professional development: "Educator collaborative learning consistently produces strong, positive effects on achievement of learning outcomes" (p. 42).

<div align="center">Professional Learning Communities</div>

Widely cited and producing numerous seminal pieces in the field of Professional Learning Communities, Richard DuFour, Rebecca DuFour, and Robert Eaker have written extensively in this field. Their book *Revisiting Professional Learning Communities at Work* (2008) is often used as a guidebook for schools that wish to implement Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). These authors continue to study, analyze, and revise their work in this realm.

They began the work mentioned above with a description of what PLCs are, what they do, and their essential characteristics. They reported that PLCs are driven by an intense focus on student learning, are collaborative in nature, and attempt to learn and share the best practices in the context of real schools. Furthermore, the authors submitted that PLC's and the participating teachers inherently understand the need to put learning into action, commit to ongoing improvement, and believe that results and data tell the real story regarding the effectiveness of PLCs specifically and professional development in general (DuFour, Dufour, & Eaker, 2008).

Seen throughout the professional literature on the topic of professional development, PLCs are a currently-known best practice in schools. Representational of the ideals of the effective professional development characteristics of 1) sustained over time, 2) provide opportunities for active learning, 3) add to the current instructional program, 4) provide opportunities for practice during a teacher's day, and 5) provide opportunities for collaborating with colleagues (Garet et al, 2001), PLCs are currently

being used as a systematic method of providing professional development to teachers in many public schools (Tytler, Symington, Darby, Malcolm, & Kirkwood, 2011).

One of Learning Forward's (2011) professional learning standards is Learning Communities. The discussion of that standard in their own literature reiterated some of the same ideals as highlighted in the other professional literature. Learning Forward (2011) stated, "Learning communities convene regularly and frequently during the workday to engage in collaborative professional learning to strengthen their practice and increase student results" (p. 24).

Furthermore, DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008) presented three big ideas that undergird PLCs. They said, "…the fundamental purpose of the school is to ensure all students learn at high levels, and the future success of students will depend on how effective educators are in achieving that fundamental purpose" (p. 18). That learning best happens, they contended, in collaborative environments and relationships with a focus on evidence of learning or non-learning. PLCs originate in that idea; without a commitment to student learning, members of PLCs might not do what is necessary to ensure it happens (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008). Learning Forward (2011) said, "Communities of caring, analytic, reflective, and inquiring educators collaborate to learn what is necessary to increase student learning" (p. 25).

The authors identified the following functions of PLCs: to "clarify what each student must learn, monitor each student's learning on a timely basis, provide systematic interventions that ensure students receive additional time and support for learning when they struggle, and extend and enrich learning" when necessary (DuFour, Dufour, & Eaker, 2008, p. 18). In other words, PLCs essentially ask and answer four questions: 1)

What do we want students to learn? 2) How will we know if they learned it? 3) What will we then do with kids who do not learn what we intend? 4) What will we do for kids who learn the material and need enrichment? (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008).

Instructional Coaching

Along with PLCs, instructional coaching is currently frequently used as professional development in schools in the United States. The literature regarding professional development for teachers indicated that instructional coaching is often used in support of Garet et al. (2001) and their description of active learning in regards to effective professional development. Instructional coaching allows opportunities for "observing and being observed teaching" (Garet et al, 2001, p. 925). Furthermore, coaching is inherently collaborative, designed to add to the current instructional program, and encourages opportunities for practice – learning and subsequently using it in the classroom. Coaching emanates from a desire to "improve, to move from where each currently is to increased efficacy, higher performance, and greater results" (Killion & Harrison, 2006, p. 7).

Essentially, an instructional coach is an individual who provides professional development to the teachers in a school after learning what individual teachers need to most effectively increase student achievement (Blamey, Meyer, and Walpole, 2009). In fact, Killion and Harrison (2006) in their book *Taking the Lead* identified the multiple roles that instructional coaches serve: resource provider, data coach, curriculum specialist, instructional specialist, classroom supporter, mentor, learning facilitator, school leader, catalyst for change, and learner. Coaches must not only have superior

content and pedagogical knowledge; they must also have the innate ability to teach and work closely with their teacher colleagues (L'Allier, Elish-Piper, & Bean, 2010).

How coaching roles are demonstrated in a school depends on both the needs of the school and the needs of the individual teacher. For example, the data that is produced by way of student grades, state assessment results, and other large-scale summative assessments, should drive what form instructional coaching should take in a building (Blamey et al., 2009; Martin & Taylor, 2009). That said, the interactions of coaches with teachers, the exact professional development provided to teachers, should be individualistic in that it should provide to a teacher what that teacher needs, not a standard one-size-fits-all model (Blamey et al., 2009). When instructional coaches are working closely with teachers, real student academic achievement gains have the possibility to be the greatest. Instructional coaches must also prioritize their activities to ensure that those activities most likely to reap academic achievement gains are used (L'Allier et al., 2010).

<center>Professional Development in Rural Schools</center>

As 49% of schools in the United States are rural (Howley & Howley, 2005), as well as the majority of school districts in North Dakota (U.S. Census, 2010b; NDHSAA, 2011), identifying issues, hindrances, challenges, and possible strengths of professional development in such schools and school districts is important in trying to ascertain the extent to which professional development in all schools is equitable. The literature on this topic asserted that professional development in rural schools and districts is often a struggle (Beswick & Jones, 2011). Chval et al. (2008), in fact, conducted a study of science and mathematics teachers that identified professional development activities that

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teachers from rural schools were much less likely to have participated in when compared to their urban counterparts. Those activities were reading professional literature, watching others teaching, attending a workshop on teaching math or science, collaborating with other teachers to discuss subject-specific teaching issues, attending a college or university course, attending a conference, working as a mentor, collaborating via telecommunications technology with teachers "at a distance" (p. 35).

Challenges to Rural Professional Development

As Bergstrom (2008) stated, "…professional development in a rural region is certainly a challenge" (p. 36). Perhaps the largest issue, the issue that affects other issues, is the isolation experienced by teachers in rural schools and school districts. Teachers believe they are inherently disadvantaged by the rural setting (Tytler et al., 2011).

Chval et al. (2008) identified activities that rural teachers are less likely to have experienced in regards to professional development (listed above). Perhaps because of these reasons and because of their own isolation, teachers are often unsure exactly what sort of professional development they need. It might be possible that teachers in rural settings often don't know what they don't know (Beswick & Jones, 2011).

Furthermore, the isolation of rural schools and school districts affects the ability to release teachers from their normal classroom duties to participate in professional development. Multiple authors identified the inability of schools and school districts to find substitute teachers so that classroom teachers can be provided release time (Beswick & Jones, 2011; Goos, Dole, & Geiger, 2011; Pegg & Panizzon, 2011). Garet et al. (2001) stressed that collaboration was part of effective professional development. Due to the lack of substitute teachers and other problems caused by the "tyranny of distance" (Pegg

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& Panizzon, 2011, p. 164), collaboration among teachers in rural schools is difficult. Inherent in collaboration is a need for multiple teachers to be able to spend time with each other; this puts further pressure on the shortage of substitute teachers in rural settings.

Also at issue, rural schools and school districts report higher turnover among faculty (Goos et al., 2011), and they often have a difficult time attracting veteran teachers. This often results in a younger, less-experienced faculty (Mitchem et al., 2003). The nature of rural schools also dictates that teachers are busier than their colleagues in urban settings (Tytler, Symington, Malcolm, & Kirkwood, 2009). Having more courses for which to prepare, having more assigned duties, and performing tasks completed by trained specialists in more urban settings, rural teachers are busy. Combined, these issues make the continuity of professional development, the consistent ongoing nature of professional development that Garet et al. (2001) addressed, somewhat difficult.

Despite the challenges, teachers in rural schools reported having supportive administrators that understand the value of quality professional development for their teachers (Beswick & Jones, 2011). That said, the principals in rural schools claimed to have fewer funds to use for professional development. As Mitchem et al. (2003) stated, "In light of multiple roadblocks to rural professional development, administrators must make the most strategic use of limited resources" (p. 102).

Relatively recent advancements in technology contribute to the ability of teachers to participate in professional development from remote or rural locations (Mitchem et al., 2003). Lyons (2008) reported that many rural locales are moving towards an online system of professional development delivery. Yet, while teachers in a study conducted by

Broadley (2010) admitted confidence in using technology to access professional development, those rural teachers thought that face-to-face or a mixed method of delivery were more effective for their own learning than an online-only system. Other challenges with the technology itself might be prohibitive. The literature asserted that slow connection speeds, broken equipment, and similar situations might dampen the effectiveness of such professional development (Beswick & Jones, 2011). People hired by the district to troubleshoot technological issues might also be busy teaching a class or working in another school building when needed; both are identified as issues somewhat specific to rural settings where large information technology departments are not the norm (Tytler et al., 2009).

Summary

This chapter highlighted the professional scholarly literature regarding professional development for teachers, including the characteristics of effective professional development, professional learning communities, instructional coaching, and the difficulties of rural professional development. The scholarly literature provided in the literature review will provide a foundation for the methodology, the data gathering, the data analysis, and the data reporting. For example, the characteristics provided in the review of literature regarding effective professional development will be utilized in the process of writing interview questions, compiling a survey, and looking at the raw data. Likewise, the literature review addressed two current best practices in professional development: Professional Learning Communities and Instructional Coaching. Those two modes of professional development will be analyzed to the extent the schools either do or don't employ them. Furthermore, the impediments to professional development in

rural schools as identified in the review of literature will be analyzed along with the rural

schools and any impediments to effective professional development the teachers perceive

and report.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to describe selected teachers' perceptions of the state of professional development in both urban and rural schools in the state of North Dakota in order to ascertain if the targeted legislation meant to improve academic achievement of all students and provide equity in educational opportunity has impacted teacher professional development, an important link in the chain of improved teaching and learning. Described below is the methodology used in ascertaining the perceptions of selected teachers in North Dakota regarding professional development.

Research Design

This research used a mixed methodology design. This research used both quantitative methods and qualitative methods in data gathering and data analysis. More specifically, a Concurrent Triangulation Design was used. In this design, the qualitative data is collected and analyzed simultaneously as the collection and analysis of the quantitative data. Then the data results are compared for the purpose of answering the research questions (Creswell, 2009). Furthermore, Creswell (2009) asserted, "Ideally, the weight is equal between the two methods, but often in practice, priority may be given to one or the other" (p. 213). The purpose of using a mixed methods design for this research is based on the assumption that using both qualitative and quantitative data would more likely accurately describe teachers' perceptions of professional development versus just using one method.

In the qualitative realm, this research utilized a phenomenological design paradigm. Creswell (2007) said, "…a phenomenological study describes the meaning for selected individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon" (p. 57). The concept or phenomenon in my research was professional development, and I asked several individuals about their experiences regarding it. In describing a general overview of phenomenological design, Creswell (2007) stated, "The inquirer then collects data from persons who have experienced the phenomenon and develops a composite description of the essence of the experience for all the individuals" (p. 58). That is not to say that phenomenology is all description; it is not. It is also interpretive in that I, as the researcher, make an interpretation of the "meaning of the lived experiences" (Creswell, 2007, p. 59).

In the quantitative realm, a Survey Method Plan was utilized. A survey design "provides a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population" (Creswell, 2009, p. 146). This method uses a survey to assist in answering the research questions. As part of this methodology the researcher is concerned with the population to be sampled, the survey instrument, variables, and data analysis and interpretation (Creswell, 2009).

<center>Bias in Qualitative Research</center>

Within the philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research lies the possibility of bias. At the heart of qualitative research is a sense of the humanity of the researcher, the participants, and the results. With this comes the real possibility that the researcher's biases will emanate from the study to the extent that the research and the results will not

be valid or trustworthy. The remedy for such a possibility is the requirement that the researcher state possible bias(es) and how he/she attempted to curtail it (Maxwell, 2005).

Glesne (2006) recommended that the researcher reflect on his/her own bias and consider how he/she will "use and monitor it" (p. 37). In the area of professional development, I have much bias. As a public school teacher for sixteen years I participated in yearly useful and effective professional development, and I also participated in ineffective and often torturous professional development. In that time, I taught in both urban and rural settings. I taught in middle schools with student populations of approximately 1500, and I taught in a rural school district where the entire K-12 student population was less than 650. Furthermore, as a faculty member at a local university, I worked to prepare pre-service teachers for the classroom. Over the past few years I had the opportunity to lead and teach teachers as part of the professional development requirements of their schools and school districts. I facilitated professional development in ways that I thought would be most appropriate for the target audience, the selected topic, and that utilized teaching and learning strategies I embrace myself as a teacher engaging in professional development. The strong beliefs I have regarding professional development result from these experiences in multiple settings.

I believe that some professional development is highly useful; other professional development is burdensome to teachers in that it is time-consuming and valueless. I believe that teachers are oftentimes unwilling to find value in professional development. I believe that principals and superintendents often attempt to schedule professional development that requires little work on their part, whether or not a need exists in the school for such training. Having worked in both urban and rural settings, my assumption

is that, in general, the professional development provided in urban schools is of higher quality than that provided in rural schools; my belief is that urban schools provide professional development that is more engaging, that meets the needs of teachers more often, and that often reflects a school-wide supposition that teachers can be affected by professional development in positive ways. This is all part of my bias.

Glesne (2006) said to "use and monitor" (p. 37) my bias; I monitored my bias by being conscious of it. Furthermore, I tried to be careful to ask questions during my interviews that were not leading, that did not suggest an answer that I as expecting or that I wanted to hear or that fit my own understanding of professional development in both rural and urban settings. It was possible that because of my bias I would deem more important certain data that supports my own preconceived assumptions, and I tried to guard against that occurrence.

I tried to remain objective as much as possible in a research design that requires that I recognize and state my bias. Because of my experiences (those that produced my biases), I was in ways uniquely qualified to conduct such research. Because of my experiences, theoretically I had a better understanding of the responses provided by my interviewees. I experienced much of what my interviewees shared, and I knew what follow up questions to ask as I was very familiar with the context in which my study participants found themselves. In these ways I identified my bias. Being able to effectively "use and monitor" (Glesne, 2006, p. 37) is one way that I promote the validity, the trustworthiness, the credibility of my research.

Site Selection

In order to answer my research questions that addressed both rural and urban schools and school districts, I chose, in consultation with my advisor, two rural schools and two urban schools. As partially a qualitative study, two urban schools and two rural schools would be more effective in describing the phenomenon (i.e., getting at the meaning) than just one urban school and one rural school. Qualitative research such as this is not generalizable (Creswell, 2007; Glesne, 2006). While quantitative research is typically expected to be generalizable (Creswell, 2009), this research did not use a random sampling in either choosing sites or choosing participants. In essence, choosing sites so that generalizability was possible was not my purpose.

Because of the limited number of schools in urban settings in North Dakota, those that granted permission first were used for this research. Schools in rural settings in North Dakota were plentiful (NDHSAA, 2011; U.S. Census 2010b), and I chose schools that were close to my location so that I could conduct a number of interviews without being restricted by travel time or expense. Essentially my site selection combined chain (or network) sampling and convenience sampling (Glesne, 2006). While both terms typically refer to participant selection, I use them here to refer to my process of selecting schools in which I found participants. Using the network of superintendents, principals, and other administrators that I developed during my own time in the public school classroom, and using the network developed by my advisor, I found two rural schools from which I could glean participants. Table 1 describes the schools that were used in this research.

Table 1. School and district demographic information as of May 2013.

School	School Population Grades 9-12	Number of Faculty	District Population K-12
Urban 1	1153	85	10, 875
Urban 2	866	65	6963
Rural 1	261*	27*	530
Rural 2	125*	16*	282

*The numbers provided by administrators in rural schools represent grades 7-12. In both schools, 7-12 grades are housed together, and teachers often teach both at the high school (9-12) and the middle school/junior high school level (7-8).

Participant Selection

As described, I used two urban schools and two rural schools as the sites of my research. From each of the four schools, I interviewed two teachers; that is, eight individuals were selected and interviewed in order to answer my research questions. Furthermore, all faculty members at the four schools were invited to participate in a survey.

In the phenomenological qualitative research paradigm, participants must be individuals who have experienced the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2007). All public school teachers have experienced professional development, which means that many teachers in the four schools could be used for interviews and to ultimately answer my research questions. Using a homogeneous sampling methodology (Glesne, 2006), I limited teacher participants for the interviews to those who taught or were primarily teaching in the secondary school grades seven through twelve. Additionally, I limited interview participants to those who taught an academic subject or subjects (math, English/language arts, science, or social studies). Lastly, I chose only teachers for interview participation who had been licensed, contracted teachers for three years or more. By that point in their career, it seemed the teachers should have enough experience

with professional development to contribute to my "deeper understanding about the features of the phenomenon" (Creswell, 2007, p. 60).

Gatekeeper issues (Glesne, 2006) that would impact either my site selection or my participant selection were not experienced. That said, the exact selection of participants was postponed until I was able to receive IRB approval (see Appendix A). Making the initial contact with teachers to be interviewed for my study rested almost completely on the actions of the administrators of the schools. Once I received administrator approval for the schools to be used as a site in my research, I asked the principals or superintendents to provide two names of faculty members who met the requirements for participants, and who were willing to participate in an interview.

Problematic in this sampling method is a total reliance on the administrator to choose faculty members for interviews. That is, some administrators might be unwilling to choose certain faculty members to participate as the principal or superintendent might believe that those faculty might speak negatively about the administration and their professional development decisions. Issues such as these were difficult to overcome. The reliance on the administration in this part of the study was necessary, but also fraught with the possibility of the infiltration of the bias of the administrator making the interviewee selections.

Table 2 describes the schools, subject areas, and years of teaching experience of those teachers who were interviewed.

Table 2. Interviewed teachers and demographic information.

Name	School	Subject Area	Experience
Aaron	Urban 1	History/Social Studies	18
Brent	Urban 1	Science	28
Cameron	Urban 2	History/Social Studies	7
Dale	Urban 2	English	15
Elaine	Rural 1	English	17
Fiona	Rural 1	Science	21
Greg	Rural 2	History/Social Studies	37
Henry	Rural 2	History/Social Studies	24

For the quantitative portion of this research, a survey was written and posted on surveygizmo.com regarding the perceptions of professional development of the faculty members. Once IRB and school district approvals were given, I notified the administration in each of the four schools. Those administrators then forwarded a link to each of the faculty members in the school notifying them that I was conducting dissertation research and that they were asked to complete the survey. Those faculty members who responded to the survey invitation and completed the survey were never identified to administrators in the schools so that there were no possible repercussions for participation or non-participation. Faculty members became participants simply by responding to the survey. There was no random sampling technique applied in this research.

In total, 121 faculty members from the four schools responded to the survey. After removing the data from those faculty members who did not provide a response to all eleven questions, 107 surveys were used in the data analysis portion of this research. Of that total number, 90 self-identified themselves as teachers in urban schools (representing 60.0% of total faculty members at the two urban schools), and 17 self-

identified themselves as teachers in rural schools (representing 39.5% of total faculty members at the two rural schools).

Collecting Data

Two methods of data collection were used: eight teachers were interviewed and the faculty members at each school were surveyed.

All interviewed participants signed an informed consent form (see Appendix B) and were assured that their participation was voluntary, could be stopped at any time, and was completely anonymous. All interviews occurred at the school in which the interviewee worked. All interviews occurred either before school, after school, or during the teacher's preparation period.

Once the interviewee-participants signed the informed consent form, the interviews began. Regarding interviewing in the phenomenological paradigm, Creswell (2007) stated, "Often data collection…consists of in-depth interviews and multiple interviews with participants" (p. 61). Because of the nature of my research and research questions, I interviewed multiple people (eight secondary academic-subject teachers with three or more years of teaching experience), but I did not use multiple interviews with the same participant.

Creswell (2007) argued that within the phenomenological paradigm research design, participants should be asked two general questions: "What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon? What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon?" (p. 61). These two general questions fit nicely with my research questions in that what teachers have experienced in terms of professional development in both urban and in rural settings was paramount.

Maxwell (2005) recommended the researcher anticipate how interview questions will actually "work" once they are asked in the field. Are they going to be understood? Are they answerable? In order to sow richer data, I used a hybrid structured/unstructured interview model in which I had questions written down, but I did not necessarily stick to the interview script if the interview meandered into other related areas or if I developed follow-up questions in the course of the interview (Glesne, 2006).

The survey (see Appendix C) contained an implied informed consent that stated, among other things, that the survey was voluntary, that it was completely anonymous, and that there were no expected negative consequences for either participating or not participating. The survey itself used a four-point Likert design. Those four points were represented with the following phrases: strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree. The faculty members from the four high schools were asked to respond to eleven questions regarding the professional development they experienced in their schools by choosing one of the four phrases. The 107 faculty members who responded to every question on the survey did so by choosing one of the four phrases to identify their perceptions of professional development in their school or school district.

<div align="center">Data Analysis</div>

Once the surveys had been administered and the eight interviews were completed and transcribed, the data analysis began.

Creswell (2007) laid out phenomenological data analysis guidelines, which I followed. After the data collection, I developed a list of codes (Creswell, 2007) regarding the interviewees' experiences with professional development (i.e., the phenomenon). Once the codes had been completely harvested from the interviews, surveys, and reports,

I grouped the statements into categories. Categories were then written as sentences so that my data would contain what Creswell (2007) termed "'meaning units' or themes" (p. 159). From these themes, I noted what the teachers experienced in relation to professional development. From these, I wrote a final description in which, using examples and actual words and phrases from the research participants, I presented the "'essence' of the experience" and told the reader "'what' the participants experienced with the phenomenon and 'how' they experienced it" (Creswell, 2007, p. 159).

For the quantitative data analysis, descriptive statistics were processed resulting in the mean and standard deviation for each of the eleven questions disaggregated by rural and urban schools. That is, all of the responses for each question from teachers from rural schools were analyzed for the mean and standard deviation; the same occurred for the urban responses to each question.

In addition, a t-test for independent samples was performed on the responses to each survey question. A t-test for independent samples compares the means of two independent groups and determines if there is any statistically significant difference (Pyrczak, 2009; Salkind, 2008). For this research, additional t-tests were run to analyze the survey data in multiple ways. The results of both the qualitative and the quantitative data will be discussed in the next chapter.

Qualitative Research and Validity

Validity, often termed trustworthiness (Glesne, 2006), is critical to research. Attention to validity is essentially paying attention to the credibility of the study and the results (Maxwell, 2005). To insure validity in results of qualitative research, Maxwell (2005) offered eight possible strategies that could be used to eliminate or diminish threats

to validity. Those eight were: long-term fieldwork, rich data, participant feedback, intervention, searching for negative or discrepant cases, triangulation, quasi-statistics, and comparison (pp. 110-113). To this list Glesne (2006) added peer review and external audit (pp. 37-38) as ways to insure the validity of results.

For the qualitative parts of my study, I utilized rich data in reporting my results; this required that I provide long portions of interviewees' words for the better chance of more truthfully representing what they actually said and meant. Glesne (2006) defined rich data as "writing that allows the reader to enter the research context" (p. 38). Secondly, I used participant feedback to attempt to establish and maintain validity. This meant that I provided the individual written transcripts to those I interviewed. Each interviewee was only given his/her interview. I requested that the interviewees read and comment on my results, thereby answering the question, "Does this accurately and fairly represent what you said and meant during the interview?" Of eight interviewees, only one responded with some areas of clarification.

Quantitative Research, Validity, and Reliability

Quantitative research requires attention to validity and reliability. Validity is, in essence, the degree to which the data is measuring what the researcher is attempting to measure. Reliability is, in essence, the degree to which the results of a quantitative study can be replicated with confidence (Salkind, 2008). This research did not use any statistical measure of validity (e.g., criterion validity, construct validity) or reliability (i.e., parallel forms, internal consistency). The purpose of using a mixed-methods research design in this instance supported this exclusion. The quantitative results were

used mainly in a supporting role to the qualitative data. That, as Creswell (2009) indicated, is acceptable.

However, triangulation involves "use of multiple data collection methods, multiple sources, multiple investigators, and/or multiple theoretical perspectives" (Glesne, 2006, p. 37). This research used triangulation as four teachers in rural schools were interviewed, four teachers in urban schools were interviewed, and numerous teachers from all four schools were surveyed. Using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, I used triangulation to insure the validity and reliability of my data. Specifically, the qualitative data and the quantitative data, the interviews, and the surveys are used in support of each other for the purpose of a fuller understanding of the perceptions of teachers in relation to professional development.

<div align="center">Summary</div>

This information presented in chapter three provided background and context for the data results to follow. This chapter on methodology introduced the interviewees, described the school and school districts, described the survey instrument, discussed the researcher and his bias, and discussed in-depth the data-gathering and data-analysis. From this context the data is reported and analyzed, all essential to a fuller understanding of the perceptions of the teachers in relation to professional development. Chapter four reports the data that has been gleaned from the interviewees and from the survey responders.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Teachers in schools nationwide participate in professional development provided by the school in which they teach. Teachers are often contractually obligated to attend such sessions, and the professional development is usually held on campus or in-district. All of the eight teachers interviewed for this study discussed this sort of professional development. The interviewees for this research substantiated that in each school professional development on a large scale exists. In order to glean the essence of the phenomenon of professional development, I analyzed data by coding it and categorizing interviews in order to explain my findings (see Appendix D). My findings were organized into six themes including:

1. Schools and school districts provide professional development for multiple reasons.

2. Teachers experience professional development that fits the definition of effective professional development in the literature.

3. Various people at the district and school level make professional development decisions with varying teacher support/agreement.

4. Teachers perceive that oftentimes professional development is directly related to teaching and learning.

5. Teachers use professional development as a personal enterprise to help them meet both implicit and explicit goals.

6. PLCs are used as professional development in varying formats and to varying degrees of success.

Throughout the remainder of this chapter, these themes are used as the headings for reporting of data. The findings will be further disaggregated by the urban and rural schools utilized in this research.

Professional Development with Many Purposes

Theme one states that schools and school districts provided professional development for multiple reasons and for multiple purposes. The content of professional development varied by school and school district.

Urban Schools

The urban schools offer professional development to their teachers. In one instance when talking about past professional development at the school and district level, Aaron a teacher at Urban 1 said:

> The last professional development that I have done dealt with this 21st century skills type things with glass project, or whatever they call it. We're all getting technological devices next year….or the kids are next year….and so we have done some professional development with learning new ways how to teach, new ways how to be innovative in your classroom because each kid's going to be able to access your website and what you can do with that.

Brent, also a teacher at Urban 1, related information about his professional development experiences at the school and district level:

> There are lots of times where we get together as a whole science district…seven through twelve. And then we sit and talk about issues that we're having, maybe

with North Dakota testing. Some of our students struggle in the Earth science area, because they only have it as seventh graders, and so we talk about that with the seventh grade Earth science teachers, what we can do to refresh their memories.

In these instances Aaron and Brent report that they do, in fact, engage in professional development on a range of topics.

Cameron and Dale, Urban 2, were also able to discuss some examples of the professional development provided to them in their school and district. In fact, currently they were involved in copious professional development regarding the district's new teacher-evaluation system based on the work of Robert Marzano, international education authority on effective teaching and learning strategies, teacher evaluation systems, and the conjoining of the two. Cameron explained:

And our old evaluation system…an administrator would see you once out of three years. And now with Marzano, they're in five times each year, which is great. Our inservices have justification for that model, have buy-in for that model. As you might imagine there's going to be pushback, there's going to be some anxiousness, and so our inservices this year have been geared towards the rationale of why are we doing this. One of our first inservices of the year they actually brought in Dr. Marzano.

Dale stated:

The main one this year was this Marzano evaluation, which is new to us, new to the district, so that was a case of kind of learning a new system of how we're being evaluated. We had a couple of sessions in the fall based on that. We had a

review around the middle of the year, and then just last week we were kind of

briefed on where we are now, and where we are heading towards next year.

Cameron, Urban 2, also detailed professional development experiences provided by the

school district in past years, demonstrating the wide range of professional development

topics and formats utilized at Urban 2:

We've had guys that have been on the school board in Washington state, I don't

even remember the name of the school district now, but it was a school district

that when No Child Left Behind was introduced and high-stakes testing, they

were a school district that really was able to improve over time and they had them

come in and talk about the process of putting it all together, and what does that

look like.

The varied content of the professional development provided to teachers in urban schools

was part of the school year of teachers in urban schools and school districts.

Rural Schools

Rural 1 and Rural 2 schools, like the urban schools, reported a fairly large variety

of activities and topics covered during school and district professional development.

When asked to describe those professional development days from earlier in the current

school year, Elaine, Rural 1, shared about professional development that was used both

for their long-term plans and general district safety procedures:

Our superintendent gave us some information, he showed us what they had done

in in another rural North Dakota town, he talked about nationally what that model

is and how it's used in other places besides education, and those sorts of things.

We have also used that time to do some emergency response kinds of things,

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making sure, because we have so many new people, making sure that everybody

knows the procedures for a lockdown, and where they need to go if there's a

tornado, and some of those kinds of things that may be less important for

someone like me but is critical for the safety of everyone here. So we have spent

some time doing that.

The teachers at Rural 2 were able to address school and district professional development

as well. Greg, Rural 2, reported on professional development from years past:

Two years ago we brought in this man by the name of Kronenberg, from

Minnesota and he did two mornings with us, so like three, four hours. I thought he

was excellent. He talked about relationships, discipline, about how you relate to

kids, how you get them to tune in to you, that type of thing. We went through

differentiated instruction here; that was a big push here five, six years ago and we

spent a lot of time on it, we brought in speakers from, I think, North Carolina.

And you know, I took some things from that, and used those, and they're good.

Henry, the other teacher from Rural 2, reported on past professional development as

provided in-school or in-district:

I know one we did where we worked on Google online, different aspects of that,

and how to use that and then another professional development would be on

Olweus; it's our bullying policy. And I actually presented on that one with a few

other teachers. We were trained, and then we presented to the rest of our staff.

The varied content of the professional development provided to teachers in rural schools

was part of the school year of teachers in urban schools and school districts.

Effective Professional Development

The second theme gleaned from this research states that teachers interviewed experienced professional development that fits the definition of effective professional development as stated in the review of literature. It was evident that professional development exists in rural and urban schools. However, the effectiveness and usefulness of professional development is not always consistent.

As detailed in the review of literature, there are delineated characteristics of what constitutes effective professional development. Those characteristics are: 1) sustained over time, 2) provide opportunities for active learning, 3) add to the current instructional program, 4) provide opportunities for practice during a teacher's day, 5) provide opportunities for collaborating with colleagues. Garet et al. (2001), when recommending that professional development for teachers should be active in nature, defined active as "observing and being observed teaching; planning for classroom implementation; reviewing student work; and presenting, leading, and writing" (p. 925).

Sustained Over Time

This heading reflects a code developed in the process of data analysis. This code supports the theme of effective professional development.

Urban Schools

The urban teachers were able to explain their experiences in long-term professional development. Brent, Urban 1, talked about professional development provided for and by the science department that was ongoing. He said:

> Our department goal is to increase our state testing scores. And so we've been
>
> coming up with things that we can put in place for students to use to test better.

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You know, we've looked back at the last four years and it seems like every year

we're low in the same area, and so what can we do to increase student knowledge

in that area, and so we talk about that, and we come up with strategies for that.

And so I'm assuming we'll do the same thing and not all the time, but at certain

times of the year.

Furthermore, both Cameron and Dale from Rural 2 discussed the ongoing nature of their

professional development focusing on the new teacher evaluation system at their school.

Cameron stated:

One of our first inservices of the year they actually brought in Dr. Marzano.

They got him in and it cost an arm and a leg….but we wanted that buy-in. We

wanted our employees to see this guy and to hear the rationale and understand it's

about improvement and it's about growth and it's about helping you get better at

your job. So all of our inservices have been that way this year.

Dale, Urban 2, also talked about the Marzano inservices:

We had a couple sessions in the fall based on that; we had a review around the

middle of the year, and then just last week we were kind of briefed on where we

are now and where we are heading towards next year. So this is what we

accomplished this year. This is what we want to accomplish next year. They've

done a pretty good job of keeping us updated as far as what the next step is.

Inherent in what the urban teachers reported is a sense that they perceive long-term,

ongoing professional development as more beneficial than short-term. Urban teachers

expressed some frustration that their schools and school districts did not persevere in a

certain strand of professional development. Aaron, Urban 1, reported in this regard:

I say this about school districts – that they're the most fashionable things around and they change quite a bit. So you get going and you get comfortable with something and then all of a sudden here comes this new idea they want to put in. For the most part, we've been headed down the right direction with a lot of the same stuff with common assessments and common vocabulary and kind of doing things that direction as far as our school district. But there's always new things they're bringing in, like Common Core now.

Dale, Urban 2, reported on his perception of teachers' frustration when schools and school districts move on too quickly to new professional development, not fully developing the current topics:

I think that does come back to what I'm saying…is what a lot of teachers have been saying…give us something to work with, and then stick with it over an extended period of time, so we can really see the results. The frustration comes when you move on from one thing to the next. Like I said, the hope of Marzano is that we do stick with it for a while, and then see whether it's something we want to continue or whether it's something we need to reevaluate. As I think back on the 15 years that I've had teaching and attending inservices, that's one thing that has stuck in my mind, we never really stick with something for a long period of time to see the end results.

At Urban 1, Brent relayed his opinion on the negative consequence of short, sporadic professional development:

We go to these professional development meetings, and they're good ideas; I'll get them, I'll bring them back, I'll start working on them, and then within a week

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or two it seems like something else comes up and then it just kinda gets put on the back burner and it's gone again. We don't visit or revisit it, and it's kind of thrown in, and if it's something you're passionate about maybe you'll run with it. Otherwise it just comes and goes.

Conversely, Brent, Urban 1, bemoaned his school and school district's efforts at providing ongoing, long-term professional development over the course of many years to fix some perceived problem or issue in schools. He said:

Maybe it's the time where it seems like we've done the same thing over and over and over again and things don't change. The administration tries to tackle the same problem maybe seven, eight years and they come up with the same type of solution that they had before. You sit and you go, "This is just not gonna work, because I've seen it, and it's not gonna work."

Brent here indicated one problematic aspect of long-term professional development – it becomes monotonous and non-helpful.

Rural Schools

It is clear from the interviewees in the rural schools that they participated in ongoing professional development to a certain extent and found long-term professional development generally beneficial. Elaine, Rural 1, related the struggles that her school faced in providing ongoing professional development:

Since I am on the professional development committee, that's something that we were just talking about, is how do you have that continuity, so if you bring up this topic in this month, how do we revisit that in six months, and say how's it going

and how do we have that rollover process? How do we keep that fresh without beating a dead horse, essentially?

Both Greg and Henry from Rural 2 discussed their experiences with ongoing professional development. The Rural 2 High School had undertaken long-term professional development regarding the Love and Logic approach to classroom management. Henry in particular recognized not only the inherent benefits of it, but also the negatives. He explained:

Sometimes teachers get the idea that "Okay, we do Love and Logic, then the next time we do this, then the next time we do this." It's okay to do different things because then that way you are not boring people to death, but you've gotta be careful, too, that you don't switch from one thing to another too quickly because you're also going to have teachers go, "Well, it can't be that important; we've already gone on to the next thing."

Greg, Rural 2, also detailed ongoing professional development on differentiated instruction:

We went through a period for four or five years where we really worked on differentiated instruction, that we have to reach kids in different ways, and immediately that catches my attention, but I don't know that as it was put into practice and really did the job, and our administration really hit on that pretty hard for a number or years.

Greg indicated that, even with ongoing, long-term professional development, the desired results for teachers and classroom instruction might not emerge.

Active Learning

This heading reflects a code developed in the process of data analysis. This code supports the theme of effective professional development. Teachers interviewed for this research were asked about the format of effective professional development and their thoughts on what form it should take. The responses received indicated a perception that active learning is superior to the alternative of inactive learning. Below, separated by urban and rural schools and teachers, active learning in a professional development setting is discussed.

Urban Schools

On a very basic level, Dale, Urban 2, stated his feelings regarding a typical inservice format, which could be labeled as inactive:

> When they have possibly several hundred people all listening to the same person and they do sometimes, in those inservices when they have large groups, allow us to talk at our table. But you know how that goes. It'll start out one conversation and then get off topic, and all of a sudden you're talking about your kids and what you're doing this weekend.

Dale recognized the problems with inactive professional development opportunities.

Conversely, observing other teachers or being observed teaching was coded and discussed in this research as a part of active learning. Every urban teacher was asked about their experiences either observing or being observed, or if it even occurred as part of their school's professional development repertoire. Aaron, Urban1, responded:

> We don't do that a lot. I work with a bunch of great people. Like for instance, someone had someone coming into class today and someone's like, "Can I come

in and sit in?" "Yeah, come and sit in. Come in and look at this." We do a great

job letting people know that if we're doing something really great in our

classroom to come on in and look at it. Usually we do not spend a lot of time

going into somebody else's room to watch them or something like that.

Aaron's words spoke to a very organic method of allowing observations to occur. It is

unclear from his words that he was speaking about an integral part of the professional

development plan. Brent, Urban 1, also spoke about a previous school a few miles from

his current building:

We did that at <previous school>. We have not done that here. We would go in

and we'd observe other people and write a critique on them, or sit down and talk

about the things that we saw them do. There was never any confrontation, "Oh,

why are you doing that?" It was just things you could see and maybe give them a

little bit of a heads-up you know, "Do you know that you do this?" or "I like the

way you did that" type of thing.

When asked if observing other teachers was beneficial, Brent responded:

You know, if you got paired up with the right person, I think it was. If it was

someone that you trusted and you valued their opinion, yeah. If someone just

came in and didn't really pay attention, they were back there on their email and

things like that, then no.

While he wasn't talking about his current campus, he was addressing an urban school in

the same city, stating that the benefits of observing other teachers varied. Dale, Urban 2,

addressed his campus and their system of observations as part of their professional

development regimen:

Yep, we have a mentoring system, and I know it's required of teachers that are in

their first three years, to observe other teachers for a certain amount of time, and

I've had teachers come and evaluate me. That has been put into place since I've

taught, so I didn't do that myself, but like I said I've had teachers come and

observe me, and I think that's a great system.

Dale's perception was that that aspect of professional development was useful for first-

year teachers, but he didn't address observation in ways that suggest observation was an

ongoing, integral, active part of Urban 2 High School's professional development plan.

Teachers were also asked about professional development and the extent to which

it allowed teachers to prepare for classroom implementation of some aspect of the

professional development learning. Aaron, Urban1, talked rather extensively about using

the professional development itself as time to prepare for classroom activities. His school

provided what is termed "Tech Thursdays" in which a district representative is on

campus to provide professional development in technology. In that setting, Aaron, Urban

1, reported chances to prepare for classroom implementation:

Every Thursday we do Tech Thursday, so we come in here and we have a person

working with us with technology and stuff like that. Just apps that we can use in

our classroom; things like that that we can use. "Here's some other things and

pieces that you can use. Do you need help with your website?"

Furthermore, Aaron, Urban 1, stated:

She kinda gives you ideas and stuff like that. There's tons of stuff that I've

learned on Tech Thursdays and taken and used in my room. Tons of stuff. All

those things that you've been shown and how to do and access them, put up your website and things like that.

Cameron, Urban 2, related the content of a recent professional development session that spoke to classroom implementation:

Our building principal had us in this week, actually on Monday, and you know, what they do is for a larger staff, so they break it up, you come in during your prep period basically. And so I came in, I was in at seventh period and so he had a Powerpoint he was going through. With Marzano they do essential questions, and the first two that we were really focusing on were classroom management stuff, and there are a couple of different elements within that, obviously, and the other one was establishing routines and procedures, and celebrating successes. So those were the things we were being evaluated on this year. And then next year what we're going to be doing is the idea of learning targets. We need to have them and I used to do them on Powerpoints, and that's not going to be okay. I'm going to need to put them on a board, so probably partition off part of that board back there, and when kids come into my classroom every day, it's expected that I'll have up on the board the learning targets for today's lesson.

Cameron perceived that what the principal was presenting was to be implemented in the classroom soon. Dale, Urban 2, related his perceptions of the professional development provided this school year and how it addressed classroom implementation:

Yeah, like the first one this year, it's basically establishing classroom routines, strategies, and behavior. So it's just basically setting up your classroom, what routines you use, whether you use an anticipatory set when you start a lesson,

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things like that. They gave you other goals to work on, too, but that's been the

focus of this year: what are your daily rituals, routines, what are things that are

working for you, what are things that maybe you could change that would help

your daily routines and behaviors.

Dale here stated that indeed professional development is expected to impact classroom

practice at Urban 2.

A part of active learning is providing opportunities for reviewing student work.

Aaron, Urban 1, while talking about common assessments, was able to briefly address the

extent to which he and his colleagues look at student work, multiple choice tests

primarily:

We're looking at student assessment or student data and only 30% of my kids are

getting this question right. Look at yours, and then we all look at question six.

Yeah, mine was 28 and mine was 46 and mine was 80. Woah. Then what did you

do differently than we did?

Brent, Urban 1, also discussed looking at student data:

I mean, our department goal is to increase our state testing scores. And so we've

been coming up with things that we can do to get our students to kind of

remember things or strategies that we can put in place for students to use to test

better. You know, we've looked back at the last four years and it seems like every

year we're low in the same area, and what can we do to increase student

knowledge in that area. So, yeah, we talk about that, we come up with strategies

for that.

It is not clear to what extent looking at student work includes analyzing data and to what extent the analysis of data additionally includes looking at subjective work apart from multiple choice tests. Brent, Urban 1, indicated a professional development opportunity in which reviewing student work was done to some degree. He said:

> We also had a day where we looked at the new standards in science, and then we also went through an assessment type of exercise, where they had us look at student work and kind of break it down so it made it easier for us and would go a little bit faster.

Brent discussed here an activity in which student work was analyzed so that future student work could be graded easier and faster. It was not clear that the purposes of analyzing student work was to benefit the student. In this instance, Brent indicated that it would benefit the teachers.

Another aspect of active learning is the teacher as the expert. This means that as part of professional development, teacher facilitate the learning. Cameron, Urban 2, seemed to recognize the value of peer-leaders. When asked about a good professional development session, he stated:

> I think this is probably the most effective way of doing it. It is training people on your staff to become the experts in the area you want to get across. Then what you do is break people up into smaller groups, and you have them assigned specific classrooms, so fifteen or twenty teachers come into my room. And I'm assigned to teach them strategies for classroom management, and we go for thirty minutes on that. And then they get up and they go to another classroom and they get something else.

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His words indicated a sense that teachers have something to contribute to professional development.

Rural Schools

Active learning contains the opportunity to observe other teachers and to have other teachers observe. Elaine, Rural 1, when asked about such opportunities, talked about what her school had slated for her for the upcoming school year:

> There are not a lot of schools, rural schools in North Dakota, which have instructional coaches. There are a few, there are a few that have literacy coaches, but they're often shared with other districts, so I'm really excited to have the opportunity to do that. Part of that model will be observation, videotaping, that kind of thing, but it's really meant to be strictly observational and feedback oriented, not evaluative at all.

Fiona, Rural 1, addressed observing as part of a mentoring program:

> We started a mentor program a few years back, and part of that mentor program with the new teachers to the district was to go in and watch other people teach. I have not had the opportunity to go watch anybody else present a lesson; it would be awesome. It would be great.

Furthermore, Fiona, Rural 1, recognized that observing teachers teaching was replete with possibilities:

> It would be awesome to go watch another teacher. I'm gonna tell you, I don't wanna go watch an elementary teacher. I don't wanna go watch an English teacher. I would like science and math. Going and watching an upper-level science or math teacher would be very valuable to me. Maybe others would, too. I

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feel it would be more valuable if it was a math, science thing because I deal with

the physical sciences. There's so much math in what I do. I'm not a math teacher

by trade; that would be helpful to me, to know how to reinforce the math that we

use. Yeah, it would be huge. I would love to go see it done.

Fiona articulated clear perceived personal benefits if observation were offered on a

widespread basis. Fiona also discussed observing oneself as part of a teacher-learning

process:

I think we'll start doing this as part of our evaluation, I think we'll videotape

ourselves, and I think that will be tremendously valuable. But I don't know what

happens with it after that. I think it's a great thing for you to watch yourself, but

then how does that translate into improved teaching practices?

Conversely, Greg, Rural 2, was asked about observing as a professional development

activity. He was asked if teachers in his building had the opportunity to observe:

No, that doesn't happen. I know when we've had various student teachers here,

I've had several of them come in, even if they aren't social studies to watch me in

a class. But as far as myself, I don't go watch any of our other teachers, and I

haven't had any of our faculty come in. I know that it's been talked about some,

but it certainly hasn't happened.

When asked whether or not observation might be valuable, Greg, Rural 2, responded:

Certainly it could. Certainly it could. I know we've got some teachers who are

very good; at least I think they are very good from what I've heard. You know,

even though they're in a different discipline, it'd be interesting to go and watch

how they do things, how they connect with kids.

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Preparing for classroom implementation is a part of active learning during professional development. It was addressed in minimal ways by the rural school interviewees. Henry, Rural 2, mentioned a recent professional development in which implementation in the classroom was expected and taught across the campus, to every teacher:

> We did a whole inservice on a sentence writing strategy. And I'm not exactly sure, but I think some of our teachers put it on to make sure that we knew exactly what should be taught, instead of just saying, "Make sure they're writing proper sentences." So we did one whole inservice on sentence writing strategies.

Furthermore, Henry, Rural 2, reported on a lengthy professional development session in which no classroom implementation was discussed or encouraged. In his response Henry was able to articulate his perception regarding the futility of professional development that did not allow for classroom implementation.

> They had speakers come in, and at no time did they tell us how to use the information. They kept saying, "This is what you need to do, this is what you need to do." But they didn't show us how you would implement that in a classroom. And I can't even remember what the subject was – we went to it for five days, that's how good it was; I can't remember a thing about it, you know? And the whole time, I'm like, "How does this affect us? What is she talking about?"

The other three teachers from the rural high schools did not address professional development that provided for classroom implementation. It's unclear that such professional development was not provided or did not exist. For example, at Rural 2,

Greg talked at-length about professional development on differentiated instruction. It could be assumed that such training would allow for classroom implementation. However, Greg did not address that aspect of effective professional development and active learning. The same could be said about the interviewees at Rural 1 High School.

The opportunity to analyze student work could be a part of active learning. In the rural schools, it is not clear that looking at student work was an activity in which teachers participate during professional development sessions. That is not to say that teachers don't look at student data to both plan future professional development and future instruction. Greg explained that Rural 2 faculty often looked at students and their needs to plan future professional development. He related one such instance:

> We had several junior high students that at semester time were now ineligible for four weeks because they failed semester classes, and a bunch of us, and I teach seventh grade history, we got together and started discussing these kids and talking about how we can help them. Our counselor did a survey with that and then we got together and looked at the survey on kids, on why they're failing, and what they need from us.

Greg, Rural 2, spoke here to a very organic sort of professional development built on informal collaboration with others in the school. Neither Greg nor the other rural interviewees described a planned, formal professional development session in which the sole or primary purpose was the review of student work.

Part of active learning in professional development might be the opportunities for teachers to act as the expert. This is characterized in professional development when participants can be leaders, and leaders come from teacher colleagues. As Elaine, Rural 1,

suggested, participants are not always willing to be leaders or presenters, nor do they feel like they are qualified to do so:

> I don't know what I would share, and secondly, who really wants to hear about that? I think culturally in this part of the country, we are not somebody who wants to put ourselves out there and say, "Hey, look at what I can do." That's just not what we do. And frankly, there's nothing I could show anyone that would take two hours. Twenty minutes, I can show you this really cool way that I have of reading essays on Twitter, and responding electronically. I can do that, but it's not gonna take me two hours.

Adding to Elaine's concern about leading professional development, other interviewees perceived that leading professional development was the purview of "authorities." Henry, Rural 2, in discussing a bullying program, reported:

> We had a certified trainer come in this summer. I think it was this summer, yeah, and trained a committee of us, and it was probably eight of us. And then once we were trained, at the beginning of the school year, we then trained the rest of the staff, and that includes the bus drivers, the cooks. Everybody in the school was supposed to be trained on this.

Henry and others at his school could lead and present. Greg, Rural 2, indicated that teachers do present professional development occasionally. He stated, "And sometimes our own faculty presents different things to the rest of the faculty."

Another code that supports the overall theme regarding effective professional development, the data suggests that professional development does often support the current, ongoing instructional program.

The interviewees in this research detailed topics of professional development that were not necessarily academic in nature. For example, both Greg and Henry, Rural 2, discussed recent training on an anti-bullying program. While that does not necessarily support an academic or instructional program, planning for implementation and practice in classrooms are probably integral parts of the learning. That said, it could be asserted that stopping kids from bullying other kids is actually an academic concern that affects both the teaching of teachers and the learning of students.

Urban Schools

As reported, Aaron, Urban 1, discussed Tech Thursdays in which a district technology coordinator comes to the school and helps teachers find ways to integrate technology. He stated:

> She kinda gives you ideas and things like that. There's tons of stuff that I've learned on Tech Thursdays and taken and used in my room. Tons of stuff. All those things that you've been shown and how to access them, put up your website, and things like that.

He spoke to professional development that supported what he was doing in his own classroom, and he integrated and practiced those things almost immediately. He further addressed a previous professional development that was provided by his school district that added to his instructional program:

Carl – I can't remember his last name – used to put it on over in <another city> and he would bring in individuals, like professors or other guest speakers, and he would talk about certain topics in history. Like maybe the Civil Rights guys would come in; he was down in the South during the civil rights movement or something. So you could go to all these different sessions, and it was awesome because it was really live stories that you could take back to your room and use. Those were, to me, the perfect professional development. Things that I can pick up and take back and use instantly in my room right now.

He spoke to a very personal perception that effective professional development is that which he was able to use immediately, which supported his own instructional program.

Both Cameron and Dale, Urban 2, addressed the recent introduction of the Marzano evaluation system as the primary professional development for the past school year and for the foreseeable future years. That was seen as supportive of the current instructional program. Beyond that, Cameron was not sure he had seen much value from the professional development of which he has been part. In regards to past professional development, he stated:

So one year, you know, this is the priority, and the next year this is the priority. But from my experience, in this it's always seemed like "Okay, what are we going to do with these people for eight hours today?" It's not one of those things where there was really a strategic plan, long-term aspirations.

Cameron continued on a more personal level, stating that he's been unaffected by most professional development:

You know, to be honest, I'm going to be honest…I've never sat in an inservice

and thought to myself, "Wow. This is incredible. I've been doing it wrong all the

time and everything" because I like to think that I do a pretty decent job at what I

do.

He did not see the ways in which professional development added to his instructional

program, or ways in which he could practice in the classroom. Conversely, later in the

interview he said:

There's been times where we've had inservices and I've learned about new

technologies, and that I can use in class. Those have been very helpful, you know.

Like one of the programs I use all the time now is socrative.com, which is

something that was designed by MIT grad students, and it's a quick way of doing

assessments and it gives me instant feedback in an Excel spreadsheet. I can ask as

many questions as I want, and that was fantastic; that was enlightening.

Dale, Urban 2, heavily addressed the Marzano evaluation system being used for

professional development. He articulated how that Marzano system supported and linked

to what was happening in the English department of Urban 2. He stated:

The nice thing about Marzano is it aligns well with the core standards, because

that's what we've been focused on within our English department meetings. What

are our core standards for in the future? And they line up pretty well with a lot of

the focus and goals of Marzano, so I think the district had good foresight of

aligning those two things and moving forward.

In this instance, Dale perceived what the district was providing in terms of professional development with Marzano was supportive of the ongoing curricular program of his department.

Rural Schools

As reported earlier Elaine, Rural 1, is going to transition in to a part time instructional coach. That position overall could be viewed as supportive of the current instructional program. Above and beyond that, Elaine did not speak to ways in which professional development supplements the current instructional program. Fiona, also from Rural 1, discussed very few opportunities in which professional development was provided that added to the current instructional program. She discussed attending an inservice in a nearby town sponsored by the regional education association in which many options for learning were presented:

> Kronenberg, we've seen him twice, the second time was a repeat of the first so the second wasn't too much. But his approach, and it's more classroom management and dealing with kids, fits with my personality. It's a way to help kids solve problems and not make them feel bad, to experience failure and not feel like a failure. He was very good. And I went to one where our local DEA guy presented one on issues that our students are facing, and these are things to look for. It was amazing.

Certainly classroom management and drug awareness are issues of importance to classroom teachers. That said, it is unclear whether or not Fiona's perception was such that these professional development opportunities were viewed as supportive of the

current instructional program on her campus. That said, perhaps the classroom management inservices could be used and practiced almost immediately.

Greg, Rural 2, talked about professional development opportunities provided in his school and school district. He discussed differentiated instruction as reported earlier, and bullying training. Again, he was able to describe how he used both almost immediately in his classroom, but he was unclear about the extent to which they supported the ongoing, current instructional program. Henry, also from Rural 2, primarily discussed bullying training, Love and Logic, and the sentence-writing strategy. He did discuss in somewhat brief ways the impact of the sentence-writing training on him and his colleagues, implying that that was supportive of the current instructional program and that they were practiced.

Teacher Collaboration

Teacher collaboration is a data code that supported the overall theme of effective professional development. As stated earlier, effective professional development provides opportunities for teachers to collaborate. All the interviewed teachers in both urban and rural schools reported opportunities to collaborate within the context of the school- and district-provided professional development. Furthermore, they discussed professional development opportunities in which collaboration was not a central focus.

Urban Schools

Aaron, Urban 1, recognized the value of teacher collaboration in a theoretical context:

I believe you need some time to be with colleagues, like Tech Thursday, where you're interacting with other people in other departments.

While speaking about the benefits of working in an urban versus rural school district, Aaron articulated again how collaboration with colleagues might be useful:

> Yeah, that's something I've been working hard in our department of not having single teachers. So not having just one government teacher; having two government teachers so they can collaborate and interact and have another partner to do this with.

Brent, Urban 1, recognized the value of collaboration:

> Sometimes I wish I had someone else to talk to, so every once in a while the guy I taught with at <another school> for many years, we'll get together in the evenings and talk about either AP physics or physics.

He later reiterated this point:

> I can also meet with some other AP physics teachers in the district and we can sit and talk about some different things, and so you know if we get that time, it's very beneficial.

As far as current collaboration between colleagues, Brent talked about the addition of new, former middle school faculty members as Urban1 High School was opened a few years earlier:

> It was nice for those middle school teachers to sit down with the people that've been teaching at the high school level for quite a while and to kind of get some idea of what to do in the classroom and just how high school students act compared to middle school students.

Brent's perception of the great value of professional development in which collaboration is present is clear. Brent also had numerous ideas as to how collaboration with colleagues could be utilized in future professional development sessions.

Cameron, Urban 2, discussed instances when his social studies colleagues and he get together. This is the only occasion Cameron discussed outright or alluded to collaboration with colleagues:

> We have a social studies office that we meet in. When we meet in there, though, most of our conversations aren't based around what we're doing in the classroom very often. I mean, it's just typical coworker kind of talk, you know, news, those types of things. But yeah, in terms of what we are doing in the classroom, what's working well for us, that doesn't happen as frequently as maybe it should.

Dale, also from Urban 2, talked about opportunities he is given to collaborate with colleagues:

> We usually have one across-the-district level English meeting in the fall and one in the spring. Then in addition to that we meet as just a grade level. For example, I represented the senior classes here at <Urban2> so I met with teachers from <other school> and <other school>. We were able to come together and talk about our core standards and that sort of thing. To be honest, I wish we had more time to analyze student data. I think that's one thing that could be beneficial.

Dale later clarified and repeated his sole experiences with collaboration:

> Actually we have two full English department meetings, one in the fall and one in the spring. Then we also meet, like I said, just within a grade level, so the 12$^{\text{th}}$

grade teachers within the district come together and talk to you. So it ends up

being about three times a year we interact with the other two high schools.

Asked about the format of good professional development, Dale, Urban 2, noted the

benefits of collaboration but he bemoaned the little opportunity to work with his

colleagues:

> So I think the best way would be to present something, but then allow us to
>
> branch off and work within those goals. You just seem to get much more done
>
> when you have a smaller group setting, so I think that's why we really relish the
>
> time when they give us time within our department to work. That's something we
>
> don't have a whole lot.

All four teachers from urban schools reported finding value in professional development

that provided opportunities for collaboration with colleagues.

Rural Schools

Fiona, Rural 1, talked about a time when she was able to collaborate with

colleagues from other campuses. She was neither positive about the experiences when

she said:

> That was amazing to me, to be able to talk to other professionals that teach
>
> physics across the state, to see what they're doing, to see what page they're on, to
>
> see how they scope and sequence stuff, to see what they're doing for course
>
> offerings.

As the interview progressed, Fiona described some marginally productive opportunities

for collaboration with subject-area colleagues:

They spend so much time arguing over words. Can a student demonstrate an understanding of, can they understand, or do they demonstrate? And we spend two hours in <nearby town> arguing over a word. I'm like, "Can we just say demonstrate an understanding of?"

Greg, Rural 2, was able to articulate occasions when the faculty worked together:

We got together and started discussing these kids and talking about what are their problems, how we can help them. Our counselor did a survey with that and then we got together and looked at the survey on kids on why they're failing and what they need from us.

He didn't think such discussions were professional development, however. He explained further:

I wouldn't say it was professional development. It was faculty recognizing that this is a problem: why are so many of these failing at this time? Let's get together and talk about it, and then in talking about it, we need to find out from the kids what it is. That's where our counselor got involved. So that wasn't professional development, but it was faculty getting together talking about students and academic achievement and that.

In some ways, this demonstrated a belief that professional development was an organized learning opportunity, not an organic experience in which teachers collaborate to help their students.

Henry, Rural 2, discussed those times when nearby school and school districts congregated for collaboration. He said:

We take the day out of school and we go and meet them. If we meet here, we're

able to use the InFocus machine and show different things we might be doing in

our class and things like that. But yeah, it's just a specific day, but it's not a day

off of school for everybody. It's just that they get a sub for us, and then we meet

somewhere.

Beyond meeting with these neighboring schools and school districts, Henry did not

provide other examples of collaborative professional development provided to him and

other faculty members at Rural 2 High School.

Professional Development Decision Makers

The third theme addressed the perception that various people at the district and

school level make professional development decisions with varying teacher

support/agreement.

District-Level Decisions

Supporting the theme that indicated that decisions are made at varying levels,

decisions regarding professional development were often made at the district level, as

reported by the interviewees. Furthermore, the interviewees often indicated their

perceived reasons for certain professional development and why decisions were made to

address certain topics and use certain presenters.

Urban Schools

When asked to explain professional development that Aaron, Urban 1, had

attended, Aaron said, "Well, the bad ones are when it's not so teacher driven, when it's

district driven." He later reported on the Glass Paper Project in which each student would

be receiving a technological device:

We're all getting technological devices next year....or the kids are next year. And

so we have done some professional development with learning new ways how to

teach.

Aaron describes professional development that resulted from the instructional

innovations within the school district. In other words, because the district was introducing

new initiatives, professional development resulted from that. He did perceive a problem

with that:

We sometimes need to do less and be better at a few things. Less is more. I think

that's the biggest thing with large school districts that you get into. They got a

checklist of things that you need to look good at. And here's our list. We're doing

this, this, this, and this. But what if you're doing every one of those poorly? What

purpose have we done?

Aaron indicated that districts often offer too much, and those offerings do not always

have positive results. When asked about the professional development that accompanies

the many things he described, he reported:

We don't have very many professional district days. We do not get enough time.

That's our hard part.

Brent, Urban 1, talked about his experiences with the school district administration and

the professional development they mandate. He did say that the district employs an

assistant superintendent who deals with professional development. Furthermore, he

stated:

There have been lots of times I have sat and said, "Why are we doing that?"

Maybe it's the times where it seems like we've done the same thing over and over

and over again and things don't change.

Brent was critical of professional development that the district administrators planned

and implemented. Brent reported on other district-provided professional development

where the decisions for the content and the activities were made at the district level:

I remember a few of them at <another school in-district> where we would go out

in the commons as a group and they would try to run us through four or five

different stations. We took survey after survey on stuff and it didn't make any

sense to us. And they never really told us why. And so, those were some of the

more frustrating days, spending seven hours, getting done and going, "I don't

know what I just did."

Cameron, Urban 2, related again his school district's move towards a new teacher

evaluation system. This past school year this was the district's focus for professional

development. When asked about professional development in the most recent school

year, he reported:

What we've been doing now is we're in the process of implementing the Marzano

teacher evaluation model. They actually brought in Dr. Marzano, and I think it

was over ten thousand dollars to have him come and speak in the morning. But we

wanted that buy-in. We want our employees to see this guy and to hear the

rationale and understand that it's about improvement and it's about growth and

it's about helping you get better at your job. So yeah, all of our inservices have

been that way this year.

Bringing Marzono and his evaluation system to the school was a district-level decision. Cameron seemed pleased with this direction. Dale, Urban 2, also noted the implementation of the Marzano system as the focus of the past school year's professional development:

> The main one this year was this Marzano evaluation, which is new to us, new to the district, so that was a case of kind of learning a new system of how we're being evaluated.

What Cameron and Dale, Urban 2, both reported is a professional development focus that flowed forth from the direction the district was moving. When asked about his experiences with professional development, Cameron identified the individual at the district level responsible for the professional development decisions:

> That was something that just happened, I think three years now, where they actually put someone in the position of director of curriculum and professional development. We actually have a person who focuses on this element of the district.

Both of the urban school districts had someone on staff who made decisions regarding professional development in the district and in the schools. Dale, Urban 2, identified the school district as the primary decision maker regarding professional development. In response to a direct question regarding decision-making, he reiterated what Cameron had reported:

> Well, that's from our district. Like I said, we have a separate curriculum and instruction department that sets up our workshops, our inservices.

That said, Cameron was able to articulate his view on how districts should market professional development in schools:

> If you want to sell it to teachers, they are sometimes reluctant to it, you have to have teachers involved in that process. If you don't, it's just an Us vs. Them, and it doesn't go anywhere, it doesn't get any traction at all. So, for example, the Marzano piece that we're implementing right now with the inservices we're doing, they had a committee that was formed. There are several administrators on the committee, but there are also several teachers on the committee, so that was an important piece. I would argue that while the administration might have an agenda and they might have an objective, they are at least, on the front, having teacher input as well. Whether or not they use the teacher input is a completely different story, but the teachers are at least being allowed to have input in certain things.

Cameron, Urban 2, therefore, spoke to both district-level decision-making and to his belief that teachers should be a part of the decision-making process.

Rural Schools

The four teachers interviewed from the rural schools reported some decision-making in regards to professional development from those who were at the district level.

Elaine, Rural 1, reported that her school had undergone a shift in its professional development this year. They moved to a more Professional Learning Community Model. She stated that that shift was a result of district-level employees:

> And I think the time set aside, and the recognition that it is valuable work, it's highly valuable work, and it needs to happen, that's a reflection of new

administration, I think. Having worked with our prior superintendent for eleven

years, that was not something of value for that person, so I do think our

administration has had a huge impact on that.

Fiona, Rural 1, reported that the superintendent does make decisions, but those decisions

regarding professional development are made in conjunction with teachers. When asked

about the superintendent's decision-making processes, Fiona offered:

This is the first year we've had administrators come in and say, "What would you

like to see? What do you want to see in professional development? What do we

have that fits you best?"

This response from Fiona indicated that the administration does make decisions, but with

input from teachers.

Greg, Rural 2, reported rather little professional development direction from the

superintendent. On the other hand, Greg discussed a recent professional development

session presented by the superintendent:

We just had one here in January. It was more of an introduction to the Common

Core, and our superintendent did most of the information there and just getting

people up to speed.

Henry, Rural 2, reported very little involvement or pressure by district administration in

terms of professional development. Referring to teachers and content of professional

development, he said:

Our superintendent and principal are pretty good about not forcing them into it

too quickly. If you give teachers something, or you give them some knowledge,

and they you expect them to do it right, and do it all the time right away, they're

going to rebel. So they're pretty good about making sure that the teachers kind of

get the knowledge and then they're able to gradually get into it on their own.

Henry indicated that his perceptions were that the superintendent did a balanced job of

making professional development decisions and seeking input from the teachers.

School-level Decisions

The interviewees also indicated a perception that decisions were made at the

school level as well. As reported by the interviewed teachers, school-level professional

development decisions were made both by administrators and by committees.

Urban Schools

Aaron, Urban1, reported very little experience with professional development in

which decisions are made at the campus level. He discussed the Glass Paper project,

Technology Thursdays, and the district bringing in people to talk about differentiated

instruction. Brent from the same school only minimally addressed what professional

development on his campus contains; he spoke to those topics that were unique to his

campus and were therefore school-level decisions. He said:

> I know that when we have our afternoons here as a whole staff, the principals can
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> do whatever they want with that. And our principal, he has an agenda that we go
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> through it and it'll be everything from lockdowns to our school motto, whatever it
>
> may be. Depends on what he needs to have done.

In general, Brent, Urban 1, seemed to think that his school administrator allowed the

faculty freedom in terms of professional development. He said, "I think <principal> and

<assistant principal> really allow us time to do our thing."

Cameron and Dale, Urban 2, reported at-length about the Marzano evaluation system and the district-mandated professional development provided to ready the teachers for it. Both teachers reported that the building principal often provides the professional development to support the district programs and mission. Cameron said:

Our building principal had us in this week on Monday. What they do is for a larger staff they break it up. You come in during your prep period basically. And so I came in, I was in at seventh period, and so he had a powerpoint he was going through.

Despite the fact that the principal was the main presenter of the professional development, it is unclear from Cameron's words the extent the principal had in deciding what would be shared with faculty during this session.

Rural Schools

In general terms, the rural faculty interviewed for this research reported many decisions made at the school level in terms of content and format of professional development. Elaine, Rural 1, while talking about the implementation of a new professional development system that past school year indicated a high-degree of school-level decision making. She said:

We were kind of given that big picture idea. This is what we're doing this for, but how you get there and what your goal is for a six-month period or a school year – how you want to set it up, that's your decision. You have ownership over that. But we were definitely given that big picture.

Furthermore, Elaine talked about campus committees that make decisions regarding professional development in her school. She indicated both a professional development

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committee and a school improvement team. Here she addressed the role of the improvement team:

> Our school improvement team has done a little bit of that too, in saying this is something we need. We can see it in the data that this is something that drops off, reading scores for example. So we need to address this. We don't necessarily know how to address that because that's not our area of expertise, but if the administration wants to research that and figure that out, we think that this is really critical.

Apart from committees, Elaine isn't certain teachers have much of a voice in professional development decision-making at Rural 1 High School:

> I would say the general population of teachers just saying, "This is something we need to know about," very, very little. So I think there's definitely still a disconnect between the faculty as a whole having a voice in those little pockets, like school improvement or something like that.

Later, she expressed some disappointment with decisions that were made on her behalf in the realm of professional development. She said:

> So I think it's the mindset, "What do we need and how do we get it?" And I think sometimes those decisions are made by people who just don't know how it works anymore.

Fiona, Rural 1, was asked about how much input teachers have when it comes to professional development planning and decision-making:

> This is the first year that we've had the administrators come in and say, "What would you like to see? What do you want to see in professional development?

What do we have that fits you best, and we have a committee together that's

looking at it."

Likewise, Greg, Rural 2, when questioned about decision-making regarding professional

development, stated the existence of a committee:

That is part of the school improvement committee that we have. That's one of our

main duties to determine each year, "What are we going to do for staff

development?"

He explained the composition of the committee:

I was on the school improvement committee. We have this standing school

improvement committee, and I happened to be on it at the time. The teachers all

rotate, you know, onto that.

Furthermore, in response to the ways in which the district and school administrators

garner input from faculty regarding professional development, Greg, Rural 2, explained:

Like I said, that goes back to that school improvement committee. I think the

committee basically comes up and the superintendent sits on those committee

meetings. They decide what we need to do, and they go ahead and if they have to

bring somebody in from Minnesota or whatever, that planning and all takes place

there. Sometimes our faculty presents different things to the rest of the faculty.

Henry, Rural 2, reiterated the functioning of that school's campus improvement

committee:

Our superintendent is real good about letting the teachers and everybody else,

parents, whoever's on there, lead it. Because sometimes you get this idea that this

is what we need to do, but it might not be what we should be doing. If might be

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just one person's idea. So he's real good about making sure, because otherwise, if

it's his idea all the time, no sense in having a committee, you know.

Greg and Henry, Rural 2, reported a system of professional development decision-

making that included the superintendent at the district level, but also allowed for the

voices of other stakeholders to be heard and considered.

Teaching and Learning at the Center

The fourth theme gleaned from this research indicated that teachers often perceive

professional development to be directly related to teaching and learning. Interviewees

from all four schools spoke of an understanding that the ultimate purpose of professional

development for teachers is improved teaching and, therefore, improved learning on the

part of students.

Targeted Professional Development

Supporting the fourth theme of the data, interviewees indicated that oftentimes

professional development offered in their schools was targeted to a specific academic

need within the school. In other words, the interviewees perceived that the school leaders

and professional development decision-makers desired to move the school in a certain

direction in the realm of academics, and professional development was provided to assist

in targeting those areas.

Urban Schools

Aaron, Urban1, spoke about a current focus on common vocabulary, a topic

connected to the academic purpose of the school. The school wanted all kids to exit the

high school with common vocabulary in the history realm. He reported:

This year a big push for the social studies teachers was common vocabulary that kids should know as they're leaving our room, like "democracy." These are words maybe that we focus on per chapter or per unit or whatever. Obviously some of these words just keep popping up and popping up and popping up throughout, like "nationalism." It pops up a hundred different times in your book. They should know what that is; they should know leaving my room.

Aaron, Urban 1, indicated that conversations regarding the common vocabulary were a focus of professional development. Also, as reported earlier, he spoke to the Tech Thursdays held on his campus, in which targeted professional development is provided that supports the teaching and learning mission of the school. Brent, Urban 1, as reported earlier, talked about a professional development day early in the school year in which both the content and the activities of the day were focused on a specific science-related topic:

Then we also had a day where we looked at the new standards in science, and then we also went through an assessment type of exercise, where they had us look at student work and kind of break it down so it made it easier for us and would go a little bit faster.

Cameron, Urban 2, again reported on the Marzano evaluation system for teachers being implemented in his school and school district; this was a system targeting the behavior of teachers in the classroom for the purpose of improved teaching. Brent, Urban 2, also spoke to the purpose of professional development in the school that year. He was speaking about the inservices surrounding the new evaluation system:

Like the first one this year, it's basically establishing classroom routine strategies

and behavior. So its just basically setting up your classroom, what routines you

use, whether you use an anticipatory set when you start a lesson, things like that.

He spoke here to a system that targets the teaching and learning environment on his

campus.

Rural Schools

Elaine, Rural 1, spoke to a recent professional development opportunity in which

the English teachers gathered and looked at the Common Core standards, working on a

very teaching-centered focus. She stated:

The beginning of the year was to work through the new Common Core standards

and identify those that we needed kids to know when they left, or moved on to the

next level; what we felt was important for them to know; and what we felt was

nice for them to know. So we tried to level each benchmark into one of these

three categories, and, as you know, with Common Core, there are a lot of them

because it's literature information. But they're also repetitive, so once we got

moving, it went relatively quickly because one led into the next.

Fiona, Rural 1, also reported similar professional development exercises within the

science department, indicating a targeted focus to the professional development in their

school.

As previously detailed, Greg, Rural 2, discussed professional development

opportunities that targeted the high numbers of students who struggled with academic

eligibility. Those opportunities were part of a focus on academics, and teaching and

learning. Henry, Rural 2, had discussed the sentence writing strategy that targeted an academic focus.

Improved Academic Achievement

As supportive of the overall theme of teaching and learning, this data code indicated that the teachers interviewed for this research reported a perception that professional development generally contained a real possibility of improved academic achievement. Sometimes that perception was very specific to the interviewee's school and school district; in other words, the interviewees often felt that the professional development provided at their own school helped their own students with improved academic achievement.

Urban Schools

Aaron, Urban 1, described in general terms those professional development opportunities provided by his school for the ultimate purpose of improved academic achievement of students. Tech Thursdays is one example of this. Brent from the same school was more able to pinpoint exact times and opportunities when professional development was used to improve achievement. Referring to groups of science teachers meeting together, he reported:

> They're talking about, you know, last year where was it that students didn't get the invertebrate section, what didn't they understand, and how can we teach that differently this year? And so they actually go through that stuff, then they sit and they develop different activities together, that hopefully will benefit the students.

Brent, Urban 1, also commented later:

We've looked back at the last four years and we're, it seems like every year, we're low in the same area, and so what can we do to increase student knowledge in that area? And so yeah, we talk about that, we come up with strategies for that. And so I'm assuming that we'll do the same things and, you know, not all the time, but at certain times of the year.

When asked if those efforts had indeed improved academic achievement, Brent responded in reference to the common school district assessment: "This year we did, yeah, about six points."

Cameron, Urban 2, discussed extensively the new teacher evaluation system being used at his school and in his school district, and the professional development centered on that. In relation to that, he was asked if that new evaluation system would help with improved academic achievement. He responded, "I would expect that to happen. I don't know if it will, but I would expect it to." As part of his copious conversations regarding the Marzano evaluation system, he talked explicitly about learning targets, essential questions, and establishing routines and procedures, among others. He did not explicitly verbalize the effect on academic achievement of such professional development sessions regarding the new teacher evaluation system.

Dale, Urban 2, was asked specifically if higher academic achievement was the main reason for the new evaluation system and the ongoing professional development regarding it. He said:

Subtly. I don't know if it says that in black and white, but that's the underlying message of why we're doing this and what we hope to accomplish by it. A lot of times, unfortunately, schools are ultimately judged on their test scores, whether

it's AYP, Adequate Yearly Progress, or, you know, ACT scores and that sort of

thing. So the district is constantly looking for ways to improve those in whatever

ways they can, and it does start with the teacher.

Later, Dale, Urban 2, commented on professional development and some purposes for it.

He said:

Well, I believe that that's part of learning and growing as a teacher. You have to

know what best practices are. You have to know, unfortunately, what drives the

data, what's going to improve your test scores. We never want to be a district

that's gonna teach to the test, but if there's better ways to make our students learn,

I mean I think you have to have an open ear to that.

In this instance, Dale equated academic achievement with better test scores. While they

are not necessarily synonymous, it appeared that Dale here indicated that improved

academic achievement measured by tests was a focus of professional development.

Rural Schools

Elaine, Rural 1, spoke in general terms regarding the professional development

provided by her school and its impact on improved academic achievement by students.

As described earlier, she had discussed Common Core standards and dividing them up

into three categories. She implied that was for the purpose of improved academic

achievement. Furthermore, she talked about a recent language arts meeting in which the

teachers collaborated to look at state assessment results:

In fact, we were just looking at state assessment data a couple of weeks ago

because we just that back for this year from the state, and so we had started to go

through that benchmark by benchmark, and looking at specific kids and looking

at, okay, this is where they were low. They were low in this kind of reading

interpretation, or they were low in this language arts skill, or something like that.

So we tried to pull some of those things out. We don't have so many kids that

doing that on an individual basis is not overwhelming.

She continued:

They're just finished their NWEA testing this week, and so we'll be able to start

looking at that information, too, and we'll probably start that next week, too.

Fiona, Rural 2, was less specific than her colleague at that school about ways in which

certain professional development sessions might improve academic achievement. She

did, however, look forward to the future in her school and school district and contemplate

how effective professional development would improve students' academic achievement:

And I think this might be a trend in education now because research shows it is

effective, that effective professional development really helps the students'

scores. If we can help our students' test scores, we're going to do it, because that

affects our funding.

Fiona equated learning with test scores and seems to indicate that professional

development can impact both.

Greg, Rural 2, was the only teacher interviewed who, when asked, was unable to

provide an explicit example in which the topic of the professional development focused

on the improved academic achievement of students. He said:

I'm sure we've done it, but nothing is coming to mind at the moment. To be

honest with you, you know I remember in our school improvement committee,

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that was a discussion a lot. I'm certainly not saying we haven't addressed it, but nothing's coming to mind right now.

That said, Greg, Rural 2, was able to talk about a recent collaborative enterprise in which teachers discussed and took action in regards to the students who were having academic eligibility issues. This was, therefore, an instance in which academic achievement of students was central. As reported earlier, Henry, Rural 2, had reported on a sentence writing strategy that was part of a professional development session at his school. That did focus on academic achievement. Henry, Rural 2, also discussed some technology training he had received that addressed using technology in the classroom with kids. When asked if that training provided greater academic achievement in his students, he reported:

> You know, I think the interest is greater. It's so hard to tell in history. Just because, you know, the grades are better I don't know how necessarily the comprehension is always better.

Henry seemed to assert here that professional development can affect academic achievement, but he's not sure how to measure that in his history/social studies classroom.

Changing Beliefs and Practices

This data code resulted from teachers' indications that professional development contained the possibility of changing beliefs and practices in the academic realm. Linked to the idea that professional development is ultimately about teaching and learning, the interviewees perceived that sometimes their own beliefs and practices related to

academics were impacted by their experiences in professional development. Sometimes they believed that their colleagues' beliefs and practices were also changed.

Urban Schools

The four teachers from the urban schools were asked about a specific professional development opportunity that resulted in changed beliefs and practices. Aaron, Urban 1, answered in somewhat general terms:

> I am a believer that I need to constantly be changing with the times. And so I'm not afraid to go and take something and take it back to my room and try it. And if it fails, it fails. If it was a success, it was a success. To me I've never been afraid to try and try and try.

Brent, Rural 1, told about a recent inservice in which he immediately went back to his classroom and used the strategy he learned; in other words, he changed his practice immediately. He said:

> We went to a workshop where this presenter, it was just one of these ideas, talked about student work and how to show kids the right way to do things and, you know, just some ways to maybe make their work a little bit easier also. So they said, "Why don't you make a key and put it on your back wall? Don't let them take any book, any paper or pencil back there, they can go back and look at it and get an idea of what's going on. But then they have to go back and do it on their own." And so I started doing that, and I still do that. It was very easy. I mean, I just worked all the problems out, I put them back there, and the kids can go back and look at it. If they're struggling, then they have to go back, and they have to try

and remember what they saw. So it was very easy to put it. It worked well. Kids

started doing better. They understood a little bit more.

Brent was quick to point to one practical application of what was learned at professional

development. However, Cameron, Urban 2, talked about his experiences in professional

development but was less sure that his beliefs or practices had changed:

I've never been to an inservice where I've just completely, radically changed how

I was doing things. Maybe one of the things I could give you as an example, and

this is actually something we're focusing on next year, this is the big element that

we're looking at with the Marzano pieces. We had this year in the fall, we had an

individual come in from a school district just outside of Chicago, another one of

the real high-flyer schools that had taken, you know, real low test scores and now

they're one of the top schools in the country. He was a superintendent and he was

talking about, you know, having some kind of objective statement that you put up

every day. Here's what we're going to accomplish. And you'll have the idea that

when kids leave the room, and there's an administrator out in the hallway, he can

ask kids what were the learning objectives for the class today, and being able to

have the kids articulate that and share that.

He continued, but contradicted his earlier statement by saying that indeed his belief

regarding a certain practice had changed:

And so that's something that, you know, I wasn't doing. I have an objective every

day that I come in, and I put it up on the board. Here's the topics that we're

covering, but I had never said "Here are your learning targets. These are the three

things that we're going to cover with you today, or these are the two big concepts

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that you have to know leaving this room." So that was something I hadn't been

doing, and I thought, you know what, I should.

Dale, Urban 2, claimed that he had not changed beliefs or practices based on professional

development. When asked, "Can you describe a time you went to a professional

development where your belief about something was changed?" he responded:

Not really, to be honest with you. You know, I have been teaching for 15 years

now and we haven't had a particular program system that we've stuck with and

really seen the end results.

However, Dale, Urban 2, was able to describe professional development opportunities

that encouraged teachers to adopt new practices. He perceived an expectation that

teachers would change their practice based on professional development training

sessions. He stated:

This is something we did a couple of years ago where they specifically gave

lessons on certain things, like vocabulary strategies, that sort of thing, at

inservices, and then we were then asked to go out and implement them within our

classes.

Inherent in this response is the idea that teachers certainly often adopt practices learned at

professional development sessions; Dale believed this was optimal.

Rural Schools

The interviewees from the rural schools, too, were able to discuss professional

development opportunities that changed their beliefs or practices. Elaine, Rural 1, was

able to pinpoint a time in which she participated in self-selected professional

development that caused her to focus on something that she'd been neglecting in her class. She stated:

> I found a class on critical thinking and there were a couple of great books attached to it. So I took that class and that helped me regain that focus again, of what I had before that I had kind of lost over time. So that was really valuable to me; that was a very valuable class.

When asked to clarify the effects of that professional development in relation to critical thinking, she continued:

> I don't know if I was ineffective. I suppose I was, though, because I think I thought about it differently. And now I see it in a different way and a different approach. Now I can give them more of a buffet than just a single dish.

She spoke to a personal perception that the professional development helped her change her practice. Fiona, Urban 2, said that in some of the district-provided professional development in which she has participated, "They have changed the way I teach, and changed the way I look at things."

Greg, Rural 2, indicated that he couldn't specifically identify a professional development opportunity that resulted in changed beliefs or practices. When asked for a specific example, he responded:

> Specific example, I don't know that I could give you one, you know, point to it specifically, but I know it's occurred. As you get older and set in your ways, I always try to keep an open mind when you do go to these things. And you know, you always try to come back, maybe it's not gonna change your whole philosophy on how you're going to do things, but maybe you get one or two things that are at

least worth trying. Maybe some of them I try and they don't stick. Others I know

have specific examples; I don't know that I could come up with one off the top of

my head, but I know it's happened.

Greg admitted that teachers should experience changing beliefs and practices as a result

of professional development, but he cannot identify one instance when that happened to

him. Henry, Rural 2, spoke to his own changing beliefs and practices related to

academics as a result of professional development. He stated:

I'd go to professional development and then I would start thinking about things,

and then I would gradually change it in my classroom. I think, you know, I'd like

to have a videotape of myself when I first started, and then halfway through, and

then now. I'm sure I was just a grumpy guy. You know what I mean?

Henry seemed to believe that his practices have changed over the course of his career,

impacted by professional development.

<p style="text-align:center">Professional Development as a Personal Enterprise</p>

The perceptions that professional development is often a very personal experience

form the fifth theme of this qualitative research. Feelings about professional development

are highly personal, motivation regarding professional development is often personal, and

the extent to which professional development supports both explicit and implicit personal

goals is individualistic.

<p style="text-align:center">Purposes Behind Professional Development</p>

This data code supporting the fifth theme recognized that the teachers interviewed

for this research perceived that the purposes behind professional development related

directly to them. That is, they often stated that professional development is fully and wholly about teachers, both themselves and the corporate group.

Urban Schools

Aaron, Urban1, was asked his perceptions regarding the purposes of professional development. His response was very personal. He stated:

> To grow. To learn. I just think that the day that you stop learning is the day that you should get out. Or you're not interested in it anymore. Just get out because you're not doing anybody any good. You're a performer up there every day, and you need to learn and you need to be innovative and you need to continuously grow. If you don't you're going to lose your students. I've got to constantly get better. If I don't keep striving that way, time to look for something else.

He speaks to a very personal part of professional development. The purpose is all about him as the teacher in the classroom. Brent, Urban 1, did not address the purposes of professional development in specific personal ways.

Cameron, Urban 2, spoke in a very personal way about perceived purposes of professional development. For him, professional development was often used as personal affirmation. He stated:

> I have never been to an inservice where it's been, you know, the person has been convincing in saying, you know, what you're doing is wrong. In fact, a lot of times, like I said, not to toot my own horn, but a lot of times it's kind of vindication. Okay, this is why I do what I do and how I do what I do. Sometimes you say maybe I could do things a little bit differently, but for the most part, I feel

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pretty comfortable about the experience I give kids in this class on a day-to-day

basis.

Dale, Urban 2, spoke in very general terms about professional development and its

impact on teachers. He stated that the purpose of professional development is generally to

improve the instruction provided in the classroom. However, he noted that the

effectiveness of the professional development was dependent on a number of teacher

behaviors and attitudes. He said:

A lot of times teachers maybe go into an inservice with the attitude that an

inservice is going to be a waste of time. But if you feel the district is listening to

you and taking your comments at heart, and you see those changes in an

upcoming inservice, then you have a much better attitude going in. But a lot of

people, "I don't want to do any inservices, okay? I'm fine. I teach fine."

He spoke to a perceived nature of professional development that says that professional

development is a personal enterprise, and some teacher may or may not see the value in

it.

Rural Schools

Elaine and Fiona, Rural 1, talked about negative perceptions as they relate to the

personal nature of professional development. Elaine articulated a reason why professional

development is important to her: "What I do is my passion, and I want to be better at it."

However, Elaine expressed frustration that oftentimes professional development has not

addressed her needs. She reported:

I think traditionally professional development has always been disappointing to

me because it's a one-size-fits-all approach, and it's decided what we do in that

time by some hierarchy, by some outside entity that doesn't necessarily have any

idea what I struggle with as a teacher on a daily basis, or what I want to be

challenged by as a teacher.

She perceived that professional development held the promise of meeting her personal

needs, but it often was found lacking. Fiona, Rural 1, stated a personal purpose for

professional development. She said:

I want specific resources for my content area. New ways to teach. What I would

like in my professional development is I would like skills and strategies that help

me teach to different types of intelligences of kids. I want to be a better classroom

teacher; that is what I want from professional development.

Greg, Rural 2, expressed his personal purposes for professional development. He

reported:

I think in any profession, and certainly in teaching, if you stop trying to get better

you stop being a good teacher. You know, you've always got to look to find ways

to improve your classroom instruction, your relationship with students. So I think

as I get older and more experienced I find fewer professional developments that I

think are good. But I still think you always have to seek those and when you do

find them, you certainly look to ways to always improve your methods.

Greg also later discussed the personal nature of professional development, indicating that

every teacher has different needs:

So those are the types of things are very valuable, at least to me, and I guess that's

what professional development is. I don't know that you can do something that

fits every teacher in your school. Some are going to find others more interesting

and more things you can take from them and use than others.

Henry, Rural 2, reiterated that point regarding the personal nature of the purpose for

professional development. He stated:

I think the main thing is that people are going to try to do the best job they can, as

long as they have the knowledge to do it. The thing is sometimes we say that this

teacher is not doing this or that. I think a lot of times it just has to do with they

don't have the knowledge to be able to do it a different way. So professional

development is a good way for them to learn the proper way of doing something,

or a better way of doing something.

He later discussed the impact professional development can have on teachers

individually. He said:

There's always a few that don't, but I think for the most part a lot of teachers want

to do the right thing, especially if they have a positive environment around them

and it's catching. It's pretty hard for you to be the rotten egg in the bunch if

everybody else is trying to push to a positive direction. And I think right now if

you give them that information, and you show them the benefits and how to do

something, I think for the most part, you know, and I'm talking ninety-nine

percent of the time, that people will do the right thing.

Here Henry seems optimistic that professional development holds potential to help

teachers and that teachers are usually receptive to getting better at their craft.

Self-selected Professional Development

Supporting the overall theme asserting professional development is often personal, the teachers in all four schools reported that they often had opportunities to pick professional development that matched individual goals and interests. In most cases, such self-selection of professional development resulted in positive feelings about the opportunity.

Urban Schools

Aaron, Urban1, reported that his school district offered numerous professional development opportunities that could be self-selected:

> There's so much our district provides that we can sign up for online; there's all sorts of things we can do. It just depends on how much time you have, and other things you have going on in your life.

He later added:

> We have a website – Moodle – that we do that there's classes provided by other teachers that are constantly going on. Webinars. You can go and get professional credit for it. You can either get paid for it, the district will pay for it, or you can put 15 hours into it and they'll pay for those hours, or towards your license that you got to renew. Our district does a great job of providing lots of stuff like that. Daily, weekly, monthly, they've already got the stuff up for the summer that they're doing. So our district is really, really good about making things available to us.

When asked how many classes were offered during the summer by his school district, Aaron, Urban 1, reported that there were approximately 30 different professional

development opportunities. Furthermore, he talked about other opportunities he's experienced in which he was able to receive professional development:

> They might say, "Would you go to a conference and come back?" And you usually present to your staff or something like that. Or there might be something where you might just say, "There's a conference or a one day thing that's coming to the Ramada here on ADHD. I really would like to go because I would like to find out some more information about it. I got four or five kids in my room who are really bad, and I wanna just go and find out some more information." And they have let me do that, too. They usually give a day or two if I want to go over to <neighboring town> to look at block scheduling. They would allow that to happen. They're really good about those things.

Aaron was also asked about the local regional education association and the extent to which it offered professional development to his school and school district's teachers. He was unable to state positively that his school district was a member of such an association.

Brent, Urban 1, talked about professional development provided by the National Science Teacher's Association (NSTA) that is held a distance from the school. He has often been given the opportunity to attend such professional development and he has found it useful. He explained his participation:

> I've gone to three NSTA's and I went to a couple of the AP workshops. If I could go to one of those every year it would be so nice because you just bring back so many new ideas and just talking to other people in different parts of the country. It's awesome.

He reported that his school district covered the costs of such professional development. He also stated:

> The last one we went to was in Boston about four years ago, and I bet I brought back and used probably twenty different things in my classroom for the year. Just by going to demonstrations and workshops there on different ideas as far as how to teach physics in a little bit different way to help students understand it conceptually. It just kinda gives you a rebirth, I think, and gives you that edge to try to do some new things again.

As part of travelling for professional development, Brent stated that the administration of his school is willing to help with costs and to pay for substitute teachers during the absence. When asked about professional development provided as part of the local regional education association, Brent was aware that his school district was part of such an organization, but he stated there was no benefit for him or his colleagues of his district belonging to such.

Cameron, Urban 2, discussed the opportunities provided by his school district in the realm of professional development. He reported:

> There's classes that are put on by the district, you know, on a variety of different things that people can take part in, and you know it's the four until five o'clock or whatever, and I do see those happening.

When asked about the number of afternoon elective opportunities, he stated:

> I'm just going to ballpark here, okay, I would think four or five, maybe six. But you know, it just depends on the scheduling and some of those things. But they are there. Some of the people that have already gotten master's degrees and are

just looking to get another fifteen credits or thirty credits so they can do a lane

change. Yeah, they are being used.

Cameron, Urban 2, is the only urban teacher who addressed the practice of teachers

attending self-selected professional development opportunities for the purpose of moving

up the salary schedule, in order to earn more money. He also addressed the extent to

which the regional education association was able to contribute to his professional

development experiences. Cameron asserted that while his school district was indeed part

of an association, this year they had no contact with it, and contact has been limited in the

past. Dale, Urban 2, spoke about a recent personally-selected professional opportunity:

The latest I did, as far as professional development, is we're moving to a unified

website called the Edline. We had a school-centered site before, and now we're

adapting to a new site, so I went to a professional development, a prism class for

about six hours on that, to learn that. That wasn't mandatory, it was optional, but

that's one of the things I've done recently as far as professional development. And

then the district provides different opportunities.

He continued:

Prism hours are graduate-level classes, or hours you can accumulate towards

earning credits because you have to get re-certified every few years. So the

district consistently offers these prism classes, and for me specifically it was

working on updating web design and having web access, but they offer

everything. Two months ago I took a prism class on things like IED, CPR, first

aid, CPACE, and safety because that was required for my coaching. But they

provide things anywhere from learning how to use Google docs or Google

Chrome. I've actually been really impressed with the number of opportunities we

as teachers are provided with to, basically, improve in our profession.

Above and beyond what the district provides in these prism courses, Dale, Urban 2,

indicated that his district has allowed personnel from his department to travel to distant

conferences and professional development opportunities, but he did not identify any such

travel specifically. He did report that he himself had never gone to such conferences,

except for those required for his coaching. Furthermore, Dale was unable to confirm that

his district was part of a regional education association, and professional development

opportunities were not provided in that manner from that association as far as he knew.

Rural Schools

Elaine, Rural 1, juxtaposed mandatory professional development with that which

she was able to choose for herself:

I have traditionally not been all that thrilled with inservice time and that kind of

thing. I have sought out my own classes to take in the summertime, books to read,

speakers to listen to, conferences to attend. Some of that I have had money paid to

do that, some of it I've just paid out of my own pocket, and I think that's just

because of who I am. What I do is my passion, and I want to be better at it, so it's

just what I do.

She indicated satisfaction with professional development that she self-selected. She also

detailed a recent experience of attending a conference out of state:

There have been a couple of opportunities where I have said I really want to do

this, and they have granted me professional leave for that. It's been great, and it's

been helpful. In fact, I just had one this March; I went to Pacific Lutheran

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University in Tacoma, Washington, and it was for a Holocaust conference. The only reason I was able to go was because my ticket out there was paid for by the sponsor, and the actual cost of the conference for educators was free. And so the cost to the district was nothing, other than what they paid my sub for those three days I was gone.

Elaine also talked about other self-selected professional development that she had completed, regarding critical thinking. Furthermore, Elaine was able to talk about the regional education association of which her school and school district were part. She was able to provide examples of professional development, but she did not speak positively to the professional development provided by that association.

Fiona, Rural 1, spoke to an incident of self-selected professional development and the benefit derived from it:

I will say that the most valuable thing I've done in the last ten years was they had – the American Association of Physics Teachers – with the whole portfolio and the highly qualified, specifically put up workshops geared towards physics and chemistry. Everybody gets their degree in biology. Almost every science teacher gets their degree in biology and then there's physics and chemistry job openings. Well, if you have to have a major in physics and chemistry, are you going to teach high school? But the American Association of Physics Teachers put together workshops, they did some chemistry ones and they did some physics ones, and I went to five years of the physics ones and they were amazing. I got the best ideas from there. It was a week, and they found money to pay us. We came home with stuff, and it never cost a penny.

In later comments, Fiona added about this experience:

> It was during the summer. It's a week in the summer and the American
> Association of Physics Teachers went out and found grant money from whatever
> their sources were. We got paid a stipend to go to the class. We got paid mileage;
> we had free room and board. We stayed in the dorms at Bismarck State College.
> No cost to district.

Fiona also commented that this was the first professional development specific to her subject matter in 20 years in the classroom. Furthermore, she stated that the best professional development of her career has been that which she's gone out and found on her own. Fiona did not speak positively about the professional development opportunities provided through her local regional education association.

Greg, Rural 2, spoke to those opportunities offered by the local regional educational association as professional development electives. He said:

> There are things they put on, different things. I don't know that I've gone to any
> of them, but I know they've put on, you know, programs in different areas. We
> have had teachers that have gone to those. I don't think I've attended any of those
> at this time.

Greg, Rural 2, claimed that three or four different professional development opportunities were offered each semester by that association. Despite the fact that Greg did not fully utilize the opportunities available, he did believe the administration would provide the necessary support to attend self-selected professional development. He said:

I think our teachers here have a tremendous opportunity if they have an area of

interest and talk to our administration, I think they've been more than willing to

work with them and get them some place where they can learn about this.

Henry, Rural 2, claimed that he participates in four to five days of self-selected

professional development activities every school year. When explaining what sorts of

professional development he's interested in, Henry stated:

What's gotten me going are the three different subjects that are probably

important to me: classroom management, Love and Logic type of thing;

technology obviously; and also the bullying thing. So between those three things

I've probably put in quite a bit of time.

Henry recognized that the local regional education association offered opportunities for

professional development, and he explained how he might go about accessing those

opportunities:

I supposed I'd have to go on their website, you know, but most of it that's done is

they'll send things out and then our superintendent or principals will say, "Are we

interested in this?" And then whoever's interested can go.

Of the four rural teachers interviewed for this research, all had knowledge of the regional

education association in their area, and the professional development offered.

Professional Learning Communities

The sixth theme of this research addressed the Professional Learning

Communities (PLCs) that were a discussed in great depth by many of the interviewees.

Teachers in both urban and rural schools in North Dakota were able to speak about PLCs

and their operation in their schools.

Activities of PLCs

        The first data code regarding PLCs discussed the various activities of PLCs. The interviewees for this research related the organization of PLCs in their schools, as well the activities of the PLC's. The two are interrelated as who is involved in the PLC often dictates in what activities the PLC engages.

Urban Schools

        Both teachers from Urban 1 talked extensively about what occurs during the PLC meetings. At their school, PLCs were organized by department. Therefore, in the social studies department, Aaron reported:

> Really what we focus a good portion of our time doing is working on common assessments and then looking at student data and how we did on those common assessments. We've also been trying to do some things with common core this year, too….just getting familiar with it. Looking at pieces of common writing samples we're doing between all the US history teachers or western civilization teachers or whatever. We also work on district stuff, too, about what they want us to do with common assessment tests.

Furthermore, Aaron stated:

> Another thing we've been working on this year is with Google Docs. We're able to upload a lot of information that can be shared between US history teachers. So we've been uploading projects and other things like that to share what we do in our classrooms, which has been kinda helpful, too.

Brett, also from Urban 1, stated:

So our PLCs…for the most part it's each department, and so in the science department we have ten teachers that get together. We sit down and talk about some issues that we need to discuss as a whole group, and then we'll break down into disciplines. So the biology teachers will get together, the physical science teachers will get together. Relatedly, Brent followed up with further clarification about what activities were ongoing during PLC meetings:

> Most of the time they're developing curriculum, they're talking about what
> they're going to do for the week, they're going through assessments and looking
> at what questions worked well, which ones didn't, kind of evaluating their own
> tests, and then just doing some kind of tying things together to kinda make things
> run a little bit smoother, I guess.

Later he also added:

> Everybody that's teaching biology at Urban1 High School has the same
> assessment at least once a quarter, and then they'll sit down and they'll go
> through it and look at the results and see where the kids were strong, what areas
> they missed, what areas they were strong in, and try to come up with a plan for
> the next year or maybe even reteach it if it was really bad.

Both teachers from Urban 1 had a clear sense of what occurred during PLCs at their school, indicating an acceptance and a perceived benefit. On the other hand, Cameron, Urban 2, stated that PLCs have not had much of a presence in his school in a number of years. He explained:

> I would say my first and second year in the district, so seven or six years ago,
> PLCs were kind of the big thing, and people were talking about that quite a bit,

and then that kind of went by the wayside, but it's not something that you hear as

much anymore.

Dale, Urban 2, also related the dissolution of PLCs in his school. He stated:

The main time I remember doing PLCs is, I don't want to say the word fad, but it

became a focus for us about four or five years ago, and then like, unfortunately, a

lot of the other programs, it seemed to not be a focus when we switched on to

something else in a year or two. So it was something that I initially liked. The best

part about it is the administration listened to us about what worked and what

didn't, and they originally tried to blend us across disciplines, like English

teachers matched up with music and social studies and fine arts teachers and that

sort of thing. There wasn't as much progress made as when they specifically

focused on departments and let us, as English teachers, talk and come together

and go over things like core standards and best practices and those sorts of things.

Initially it was, like I said, across the board, and then once we felt like we weren't

making much progress there, we moved to more department-level PLCs and were

able to get a lot more done. We haven't had set time or time set aside the last few

years now for PLCs. We've kind of moved on to some different things.

While Dale stated that PLCs were no longer used in his school, he does seem to indicate

that they might be valuable if used.

Rural Schools

Elaine, Rural 1, provided a history of PLC's in her school. She reported:

When we started the PLC process, which was probably about three years ago, we

started calling some department meetings PLCs, but what we were doing was not

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PLC-oriented. It was more student-oriented, and so now this year is really the first

year that we have done truly professional learning communities, where we are

talking about the new standards, the new common core standards, and we are

meeting now.

She added:

We only have sixty minutes for the whole week devoted to that, but it is time set

aside in our school day. It's not before school; it's not after school. It's within our

school day that is addressed to that, and that's a change starting this year. That's a

huge change.

In addressing the activities of the PLC to which she belongs, Elaine stated:

We just were looking at state assessment data a couple of weeks ago, because we

just got that back for this year from the state. So we had started to go through that

benchmark by benchmark, and looking at specific kids, and looking at, okay, this

is where they were low, they were low in reading interpretation, or they were low

in this language arts skill, or something like that, so we tried to pull some of those

things out. We're lucky that we don't have so many kids that doing that on an

individual basis is not overwhelming.

Elaine also spoke to goals that were written within PLCs in Rural1 High School. She
said:

We developed a SMART goal at the beginning of the year so we knew exactly

what we wanted to get done. We thought it would take us the entire year, but it

actually only took us a semester. So then by January we needed to develop

another one, but we really spun our wheels for a while in making the second one

work. It was kind of a learning process. It turned out we had done something wrong at the beginning , so we had to go back and fix that, and now we have done that, so I think we can develop our goal for next year.

Fiona, Rural 1, reported on what her PLC was doing. She said:

What we're doing right now is going through the standards. The Next Generation Science Standards just came out a week or so ago, final draft. So now we're going through those standards, figuring out what they say and what they mean, figuring out what we do in our building. So we're going through that right now figuring out what we currently teach, and where we teach it in the standards, and where we can piece in the other missing parts.

Looking at the future of their PLC and what their future activities might be, Fiona said:

Next year we'll be looking at what do we teach? And then we'll go to the how are you gonna know if they learned it, and then what are we gonna do if they do not, and next year will be our evaluation year, our assessment year. How will we know if they've learned it?

Greg, Rural 2, when asked about PLCs at his school, replied, "No, that term is not familiar to me." Furthermore, Greg did not talk in any substantial way about professional development opportunities that could be identified as professional learning communities. When Henry, Rural 2, was asked about his high school's use of PLCs, he replied:

Yeah, the problem is we have such a small school. It's hard for us. We don't have a pile of social studies teachers or anything like that.

He seemed to be familiar with the term, but he did not talk about PLCs either explicitly or implicitly. When asked a question about PLCs, Henry often replied with a response about teacher collaboration.

Value of PLCs

The second data code of this theme addressed the perceived value of PLC. Those teachers interviewed who taught in schools that used PLCs often ascribed value to that method of professional development. Those teachers that were not engaged in PLCs did not describe any value, naturally.

Urban Schools

In talking about what he perceived as valuable outcomes of PLC work, Aaron, Urban 1, stated:

> The value that I get out of them is that it's nice to know how other people are teaching things, how you presented it, what information did you give to them. So I get a lot out of it just really getting to know the people I teach with and how they teach, how to reflect on data, and what we can do better to make things better for the kids and the classroom.

Later in the interview, he talked more about his perceived value of PLCs:

> It think they make you grow as a teacher because you're finding out that I'm doing stuff right, I'm not doing stuff right, or whatever. Having a better relationship with the people you work with is…spend more time with them…it's easier to share with them, too. So many years you taught when PLCs were not around and everyone kinda comes in as an individual contractor to the building and here's what we're gonna do, and that's it.

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Brent, Urban 1, had less to say in explicit ways about the benefits of PLCs at his high school. Speaking about the biology teachers in his department, he stated:

> They're talking about last year where was it that students didn't get the invertebrate section, what they didn't understand, and how can we teach it differently this year? And so they usually go through that stuff, then they sit and they develop different activities together that hopefully will benefit the students.

Cameron, Urban 2, was able to identify one valuable aspect of PLCs, despite the fact that his school did not use them:

> The way our system is set up, we are very departmentalized, and you can go weeks and months without seeing people that are in the basement or on the third floor. That's unfortunate, but it's just how the schedule is built as of right now. You know obviously with the PLC, you're going to be collaborating with people all the time, and that doesn't happen as much.

Dale, Urban 2, was able to speak to one valuable aspects of PLCs despite the fact that his school did not use them formally. That one valuable aspect was collaboration. He said:

> But it's really beneficial to be able to get together with other teachers and see, on a grade level to grade level basis, of what the expectations are, because there was a time – I teach senior English – and I would get a lot of senior English kids that would come in and I would talk about thesis statement, and they're like, "What's a thesis statement? I have no idea what a thesis statement is. We've never covered that before." I knew that probably wasn't true. I knew that probably every English teacher leading up to senior composition had gone over thesis statement. But there just didn't seem that there was a reinforcement level where the kid would carry it

from one year to the next. So, that's a lot of re-teaching. Now since we've had

more time to meet as a staff through things like PLC, there's definitely more

consistency in what we expect from each grade level.

Here Dale seemed to indicate that PLCs were indeed in operation in Urban 2. That

contradicts what he indicated earlier. It would appear that he here referred to any

collaboration as PLCs, and he saw value in that collaboration.

Rural Schools

Elaine, Rural 1, was able to describe a specific way in which the activities of the

PLC produce something valuable. She said:

Our goal now is to come up with I-Can statements, and that's fine. I think that

comes more from the elementary world, but we're trying to reword them so

they're usable for students and parents. So when they see those, they understand

what that means, what is expected of them, and they have some sort of end in

mind. So that's our next goal, to go through everything that we have said, "You

need to know this," and to restructure so it's language that's friendly to a broader

audience.

She speaks to a specific positive result of their PLC work; she speaks to a broader benefit

of improved academic achievement. Fiona, Rural 1, implied that there was copious

benefit to PLCs. In only one instance does she speak directly to the value associated with

them. In response to a question regarding the value of PLCs, she stated:

That's why PLC's I believe are better, because they're continual, and you

remember what you talked about last time and you build on that.

Greg, Rural 2, indicated that there were no PLC's as part of the professional development regimen at his school. Likewise, Henry from that same high school did not speak to PLC's and their value, either explicitly or implicitly.

Survey Results

For the quantitative part of this research, an online survey was administered to the faculty from the two urban schools and from the two rural schools. From the results of that survey, the mean and standard deviation were calculated. Furthermore, an independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the responses of urban teachers on the survey questions with the responses of the rural teachers. Table 3 contains the mean and standard deviation for each category of teachers, as well as the results of the t-test and the p value.

The results from the survey show that there was not a statistically significant difference on any survey question between the urban or rural teachers. While small differences are evident in the means of the responses of the urban teachers in comparison to the means of the responses of the rural teachers, the t-test calculated that there was no statistically significant difference. In essence, what the urban teachers perceived about the professional development in their schools as indicated in their responses to the survey questions was similar to what the rural teachers perceived about the professional development in their schools.

Additionally, the data was disaggregated further so that all teachers were separated by subject area to see if that made any difference in the results of the t-test. In essence, the responses to the survey questions from the English teachers in urban schools were compared to the responses from the English teachers in the rural schools. In English

Table 3. Quantitative Survey Results.

	Urban Teachers (N=90)		Rural Teachers (N=17)		t(105)	p
Survey Question	M	SD	M	SD		
1. High quality	2.90	.562	2.82	.529	.519	.605
2. Sustained over time	2.79	.695	2.59	.507	1.133	.260
3. Observe others	2.26	.787	2.06	.659	--*	--*
4. Observe me	2.18	.743	2.12	.600	--*	--*
5. Classroom implementation	2.60	.667	2.76	.664	-.934	.352
6. Review student work	2.50	.707	2.29	.470	--*	--*
7. Active learning opportunities	2.90	.637	2.94	.429	-.255	.799
8. Addresses my needs	2.47	.706	2.65	.493	--*	--*
9. Data-driven	2.74	.646	2.76	.437	-.124	.902
10. Improves student achievement	2.74	.591	2.71	.470	.254	.800
11. Supports or strengthens school program	2.81	.598	2.76	.437	.305	.761

Notes: *When homogeneity of variances was not met according to Levene's Test, the results were not included.

as well as every other subject area, the results of the t-test indicated that there was no statistically significant difference between, for example, the urban math teachers and the rural math teachers in regards to their perceptions of professional development as indicated on the survey. A t-test was run for each subject area, and each subject area had the same result.

The data was again disaggregated so that all teachers were separated by number of years teaching experience. Again, for each t-test run on each survey question, there was no statistically significant difference. That is, all teachers with, for example, twenty years or more classroom teaching experience in the urban schools was compared with all

teachers with twenty or more years of classroom teaching experience in the rural schools. For every category indicating a certain number of years of experience, there were not statistically significant differences in the responses.

The data was again disaggregated so that all teachers were separated by their personal level of education. The teachers from urban schools who had, for example, earned a master's degree were compared by the t-test to rural teachers who had earned a master's degree. No matter if separated by four-year degrees, master's degrees, or doctorates, there was no statistically significant difference between the perceptions regarding professional development of the urban teachers and the perceptions of the rural teachers as indicated by their responses to the survey questions.

Summary

This chapter related the data gleaned from both the qualitative and quantitative research methodologies employed in this study. The data showed that teachers from urban and rural schools perceived both good and bad things, both useful and futile aspects of the professional development provided to them by their schools. Not always were perceptions between the urban and rural teachers different. Using the expertise of the researcher, the data from chapter four will be further dissected, and the next chapter will present discussion, conclusions, recommendations, and limitations of this study.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to describe selected teachers' perceptions of the

state of professional development in both urban and rural schools in the state of North

Dakota in order to ascertain if the targeted legislation meant to improve academic

achievement of all students and provide equity in educational opportunity has impacted

teacher professional development, an important link in the chain of improved teaching

and learning. What follows in this chapter is a discussion on the results of the research

organized by research question, conclusions regarding the results of this research, and

recommendations regarding professional development in urban and rural schools, as well

as recommendations for future research.

Research Question One

Research Question one asked, "What are teachers' perceptions of professional

development in urban schools in North Dakota?"

Qualitative Research Discussion

In coding the data for this research, six themes were identified as a means to

organize the results. Below is a discussion of selected themes used in answering the first

research question.

Effective Professional Development

A concept that emerged from the qualitative data is the high quality of

professional development. That is, the four interviewees seemed to indicate that they

found, by and large, professional development provided in their schools to be effective. While the professional development opportunities might not all necessarily demonstrate the characteristics of effective professional development as delineated in the literature, the teachers clearly felt that the professional development provided by their school was effective. They found that it addressed their needs, impacted their beliefs and practices, and focused on students.

The literature delineated characteristics of what constitutes effective professional development. Those characteristics were: 1) sustained over time, 2) provide opportunities for active learning, 3) add to the current instructional program, 4) provide opportunities for practice during a teacher's day, 5) provide opportunities for collaborating with colleagues (Garet et al., 2001). When interviewing the urban teachers for this research, a majority of the characteristics of effective professional development as identified in the literature were addressed by the four teachers.

That is not to say that every teacher addressed every characteristic. Rather, together the urban teachers were able to address most of the characteristics in either positive or negative ways. Furthermore, the literature asserted that the characteristics of effective professional development were in fact very much linked. In other words, the literature talked about the characteristics as they were used in conjunction with each other. The urban teachers, instead, talked about the separate characteristics in that they could point to a specific example of professional development allowing for collaboration. That same example did not necessarily provide any of the other characteristics. In essence, the literature was talking about a synergistic professional development system

that integrated all the characteristics. The urban teachers were not able to talk about professional development that fully allowed for such a learning system.

The teachers seemed to agree that those characteristics of effective professional development were indeed beneficial to the learning of their colleagues and themselves. For example, inherent in what the urban teachers reported is a sense that they perceive long-term, ongoing professional development as more beneficial than short-term. This general attitude could be seen as being generally supportive of the literature that asserted that long-term professional development is superior to short term.

An interesting dichotomy developed in regards to ongoing, long-term professional development. Despite the fact that the teachers from Urban 1 in particular were able to describe long-term, ongoing professional development that was burdensome and tiresome, the urban teachers interviewed indicated that long-term is preferable to short-term professional development. However, all four of the urban teachers described personal value gleaned from the shorter learning opportunities as well. For example, at Urban 1, Tech Thursdays were emblematic of a short-term opportunity, but the teachers indicated that what was taught during those short sessions was ultimately helpful to them as teachers. There is a difference between what they indicated as a best practice in theory and what they described in terms of what actually was happening in their school.

Also noted and discussed later, Urban 1 participated in PLCs which provide fertile ground for the cultivation of effective professional development. Urban 2, on the other hand, did not participate in PLCs.

Professional Development Decision-Making

The qualitative data of this study indicated that teachers in the urban schools perceived that decisions regarding professional development were often made by the administration either at the school or at the district level. The teachers reported that while they were often consulted regarding the format and the content of professional development on their campus, they simultaneously reported the sense that professional development was something "done" to them. That's not to say that they didn't find value in the mandated professional development, or that they didn't learn from it. That is not to say that all professional development provided in the urban schools was seen as valuable and well-organized, as all four urban teachers who were interviewed were able to pinpoint professional development opportunities that were not valuable. In the interviews, they indicated that oftentimes professional development was not successful because administrators organized it, perhaps didn't provide enough of a rationale, or didn't address the needs of teachers.

Emerging from the data was an indication that no matter what is offered in schools in terms of professional development, not every teacher is going to find it valuable. Ultimately, teachers are human begins with different preferences, and different attitudes and aptitudes. Despite the best intentions of those who make professional development decisions, there is going to be a remnant of teachers who don't find it valuable or helpful. This makes the task of planning professional development for teachers even more difficult.

Teaching and Learning Focus

By and large the four urban teachers interviewed for this research perceived that the professional development of which they were a part was focused on teaching and learning. None talked at any length about professional development that was not academic-centered. The urban teachers perceived that professional development was focused on academics and was replete with possibilities to affect increased student achievement.

Professional Development as a Personal Enterprise

The urban schools offered a wide range of professional development opportunities to attend above and beyond that which was expected as part of their contract day. All four urban teachers spoke to the abundance of such offerings in their particular school district. There was some evidence from the interviews that the teachers, especially those from Urban 1, saw the benefits of professional development that was self-selected and available apart from what was mandated.

This research flows forth from legislation in North Dakota that established and continues to support regional education associations; for this reason, every urban teacher was asked about their familiarity with their local association. All four urban teachers knew that the regional education associations existed, but they reported having no experience interacting with the member school districts. Both of the urban schools are in districts that belong to a regional education association. However, membership in the associations seemed to have no value to the urban teachers.

This research presents a question to consider: what value do urban districts derive from joining regional education associations? It is unclear that regional education

associations add value to the urban school districts' instructional program based on the data in this research, as measured by the perceptions of teachers in regard to professional development. Regional education associations were meant to provide a means of providing services to area schools and school districts. If teachers in the larger, urban school districts are not using those services – in this case professional development – what value is derived from membership for urban schools? Furthermore, might what urban teachers report about professional development be different if their schools were utilizing regional education association professional development services?

Professional Learning Communities

The teachers from the urban schools interviewed for this study reported very different experiences with PLCs. The teachers in Urban 1 talked extensively about the PLCs in which they participated. They were able to articulate the value they derived from their PLCs, and the activities that guided their PLC work. Both spoke at length about the purpose of PLCs and how they benefit the teachers, the students, and the school overall.

Conversely, the teachers from Urban 2 did not currently participate in PLCs and were therefore unable to speak much on that topic. Dale, Urban 2, stated that he viewed PLCs as fads that were popular a few years ago, but that had recently fallen in popularity. This perception was not necessarily shared by his colleague from Urban 2 who stated that PLCs were not currently part of their professional development regimen, but offered no editorial on PLCs in either positive or negative ways.

It should be noted that PLCs, when utilized in ways consistent with the literature, would address many of the characteristics of effective professional development. That is, PLCs inherently provide opportunities for collaboration, occasional times for analyzing

student work, are active in nature and ongoing. That is not to say that all PLCs are examples of effective professional development, but perhaps PLCs create a system conducive to it. As such, Urban 1 participated in PLCs regularly. The benefits of the PLCs in Urban 1 were addressed multiple times by both interviewees from that school. By default, it could be said simply because of their use of PLCs, Urban 1 offered more effective professional development than Urban 2, as delineated and defined in the professional literature. Urban 2 did not participate in PLC's and experienced, therefore, much more didactic, presenter-centered professional development in their school.

Quantitative Research Discussion

In order to answer my first research question regarding teachers' perceptions of professional development in urban schools, a survey was administered to the faculty members at both urban schools. A total of 90 urban faculty members responded to the online survey, a four-point Lickert scale survey. All responses from the urban teachers were averaged; the averaged responses on the eleven survey question all fell between 2.0 and 3.0. That is, the average score from the urban teachers on each question was somewhere between "disagree" and "agree."

A very significant survey question in which the respondents reported less than 2.5 on average was, "The professional development I receive through my school/district addresses my needs as a teacher." While less than 2.5 in average score, the score was very close to 2.5 at 2.47. That would signify, however, that on average half of the 90 respondents felt that the professional development provided addressed their needs, and approximately half that said it didn't. This is not entirely enigmatic. The four interviewees from the urban schools did address the idea that oftentimes they are required

to endure professional development that is less than helpful, less than useful. While an argument could be made that the teachers in urban schools were largely pleased with their professional development, it seemed as if the quantitative and the qualitative research reach the same conclusion in this respect – professional development was certainly viewed both favorably and unfavorably depending on the particular professional development opportunity. Again this speaks to the very human nature of teachers; not everyone is going to view the provided professional development as beneficial, no matter the content and the format.

<center>*Theoretical Framework Discussion*</center>

As stated earlier, professional development grounded in Experiential Learning is a cycle of goal setting and teacher planning, practice, and reflection. Looking at the perceptions of the urban teachers in this study, such a cycle is not always part of the urban teachers' professional development preparation, participation, or follow-up. In both urban schools, teachers were able to identify professional development that offered opportunities for the four ingredients of the cycle individually, but it is not accurate to say that the teachers' professional development utilized regularly the cycle in any sort of synergistic manner.

Indeed, the Experiential Learning cycle described suggested a strong link between what the teacher does in the classroom and what occurs during professional development. In fact, goal setting and teacher planning are certainly activities completed by any teacher as part of being a teacher. In the course of this study, it was not clear that urban teachers participated in professional development that incorporated these teacher activities in the professional development opportunities. Urban 1 used PLCs as part of their professional

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development regimen. In some ways, the two interviewees from that school seemed to indicate a stronger utilization of the cycle of goal setting and teacher planning, practice, and reflection than did those teachers from Urban 2.

<center>Research Question Two</center>

Research question two asked, "What are teachers' perceptions of professional development in rural schools in North Dakota?"

<center>*Qualitative Research Discussion*</center>

In coding the data for this research, six themes were identified as a means to organize the results. Below is a discussion on some of those themes used in answering the first research question.

Effective Professional Development

The literature delineated characteristics of what constitutes effective professional development. Those characteristics were: 1) sustained over time, 2) provided opportunities for active learning, 3) added to the current instructional program, 4) provided opportunities for practice during a teacher's day, 5) provided opportunities for collaborating with colleagues (Garet et al., 2001). When interviewing the rural teachers for this research, a majority of the characteristics of effective professional development as identified in the literature were addressed by the four teachers.

However, that does not mean, nor does the data support, that all of the characteristics of professional development were operating in concert in the rural schools. Instead, when asked about some of those characteristics, the interviewees indicated experiences with the characteristics in more solitary contexts. Some of their professional development experiences were collaborative and some were ongoing, but the offered

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professional development wasn't always both collaborative and ongoing. The same could be said about all the characteristics.

Effective professional development, as described in the professional literature, is described as collaborative, long term, and focused on academics. Inherent in the definition in the literature is the sense that effective professional development is not a situation in which an expert is hired by the school to fill the teachers with knowledge. Instead, the literature suggests that effective professional development is very much a student-centered activity in which teachers talk about and work on curriculum, planning, instruction, and assessment for the purpose of helping the students show academic growth.

The four teachers from the rural schools indicated often that, in their minds, they desired a "sage on the stage" who could help teachers teach better and solve problems. This mindset was very apparent with the interviewees from Rural 2. Greg especially wanted an expert standing in front from which he could take bits and pieces to utilize in his classroom practice. This attitude seems somewhat old-fashioned and very different from what the literature recommends in terms of both the content and the format of professional development. Greg had the most classroom experience of all the teachers interviewed for this research. It is unclear to what extent his extensive time in the classroom adds to his views of professional development.

The rural teachers did not consistently indicate a preference for long-term, ongoing professional development. In fact, those interviewees from Rural 2 were able to address some long-term opportunities, but often unable to describe any tangible value

derived from them. Greg in particular stated that long-term professional development has been offered, but he could not describe any change to his beliefs or practices.

Professional Development Decision Making

Two striking ideas emerged from the qualitative data from the rural schools. First, the interviewed teachers from Rural 1 reiterated numerous times that for them the direction of their professional development depended on the administration. While that was true for Rural 2 as well, it was repeatedly highlighted with the two teachers from Rural 1. They reported that the current administration arrived and began making executive decisions about the professional development. At the time of the interviews, both teachers were very content with the decisions that were being made. That stood opposed to their thoughts regarding the previous administration and their direction of professional development. The teachers seemed to perceive that their colleagues were also very willing to allow the new administration to direct the course of professional development. At the time of the interviews, the teachers perceived that the administration had done an effective job spearheading the professional development.

On the other hand, the Rural 2 teachers interviewed for this research reported that their administration often sought input about the content and format of professional development. This spoke to a different management style in regards to professional development. While Rural 1 administrators assuredly sought input about the direction of professional development in that school, the teachers from Rural 2 repeatedly reported that the administration of their school consistently sought out what teachers desired in terms of professional development, not moving forward with professional development that was not requested or desired.

Furthermore, noteworthy that the administration at Rural 1 implemented the PLC's, while one of the teachers at Rural 2 had no knowledge of PLC's, and, therefore, could not request PLC's. Such management differences perhaps underscore the differences in the professional development opportunities. Rural 1 had more effective professional development as defined in the professional literature. The professional development opportunities at Rural 1 seemed sophisticated and focused, perhaps as a result of a stronger decision-making administrator.

Teaching and Learning Focus

In general terms, the teachers from the rural schools that were interviewed identified professional development that was centered on teaching and learning, or on increased academic achievement. As noted, Rural 2 seemed to have much more professional development not related to academics than Rural 1.

All four teachers were asked about changing beliefs and practices as related to professional development. While all seemed to agree that that was a desired outcome of professional development opportunities, Greg, Rural 2, was unable to identify any specific resulting change to belief or practice. He declared that he was sure that had happened, but he was unable to articulate one such event. Greg had the most number of years of classroom teaching experience of the four rural interviewees. It is unclear what his inability to identify personal areas of change based on professional development says about himself or how the number of years in the classroom affects attitudes towards personal learning.

Professional Development as a Personal Enterprise

All four interviewed teachers from the rural schools were able to talk about why professional development was important for them as classroom teachers. Greg from Rural 2 was less clear and less articulate about the personal impact of professional development opportunities as compared to the other three rural teachers.

All four teachers from the rural schools were able to describe experiences in professional development at the regional education association level. Generally, the teachers from Rural 1 were less satisfied with the quality of the opportunities provided, but they did report that they had attended the professional development offered by the regional education associations. The teachers from Rural 2 were very aware that their regional education association provided professional development that could be accessed as needed by teachers in member schools.

The professional literature identified issues that proved problematic for teachers in rural schools in terms of professional development. A lack of substitute teachers, a lack of funds, more responsibilities and variety in teaching load, were a few. The rural teachers in this study spoke about none such issues. Since the inception of regional education associations, perhaps the impact of such issues has been minimalized. It is possible that the regional education associations have reduced the problems associated with rural schools and professional development. Of course, it is beyond the scope of this research to determine if such problems existed for the rural teachers in this research prior to the implementation of the regional education associations.

Professional Learning Communities

Rural 1 school was in the midst of the first year of pure PLCs at the time of conducting this research. Clearly the arrival of the new administrative team led to the continuation and speedy implementation of PLCs. The establishment of this aspect of the school's professional development regimen was widely viewed as positive. The two faculty members who were interviewed responded positively to PLCs on their campus. They expressed satisfaction at the rationale presented for the PLCs and at the activities ongoing in the PLC meetings. The administration of their school had been talking about the future of the PLCs and what the possibilities were in relation to future school years. This stands in contrast to the experiences reported by the teachers at Rural 2; PLCs were not a part of the professional development regimen at that school. Indeed, Greg, one of the faculty at Rural 2 interviewed for this research, was not even familiar with the terminology of Professional Learning Community.

It must be noted that the characteristics of effective professional development as described in the professional literature correlate with PLCs. That is, when PLC's are operating, collaboration is a natural part of them. When PLCs are operating, analysis of student work is often an outcome of them. The same could be said about the other characteristics of effective professional development. By default, Rural 1 offered more effective professional development as defined in the literature than did Rural 2 simply because PLCs were in place that provided a context for the characteristics of effective professional development to thrive.

The Rural 2 teachers interviewed for this research seemed to indicate a perception that professional development necessitates an expert presenter. Greg had told of a

situation at Rural 2 in which the faculty and counselor collaborated in order to help students who were academically ineligible. It was not his perception that that sort of activity was indeed professional development. Since PLCs are inherently driven by teachers, it is unclear if Greg or Henry from Rural 2, or any of the other faculty members, would describe PLCs or PLC-like activities as professional development. They are not currently involved in PLCs and there are no future plans for PLCs, as described by the interviewees from Rural 2.

Quantitative Research Discussion

The seventeen rural teachers who responded to the survey provided responses that when averaged all fell between "agree" and "disagree." Nothing about the responses indicated a largely positive or negative response to professional development at the two rural schools, and it seems that the responses indeed strengthened the qualitative data in that there are both negative and positive perceptions of professional development in the rural schools.

Theoretical Framework Discussion

Professional development grounded in Experiential Learning is a cycle of goal setting and teacher planning, practice, and reflection. Rural 1 used PLCs as the method of professional development delivery the majority of the school year. As such, the teachers' reported perceptions indicated that the teachers in Rural 1 had professional development that more closely represented the cycle of Experiential Learning. It is not a certitude that teachers at Rural 2 didn't sometimes participate in professional development that represented the cycle. However, it appeared that participation in PLCs more provided a

situation for teachers in which the cycle of goal setting and teacher planning, practice, and reflection would more likely be evidenced.

Research Question Three

Research question three asks, "What issues of equity exist as they relate to professional development in urban and rural schools?"

Qualitative Research Discussion

Based on the qualitative research reported in this study, issues of equity or non-equity are not readily apparent. The data does not easily point to the professional development in either urban or rural schools being more effective, more helpful, or better than the other. In fact, the final assertion based on the codes, categories, and themes used in the data analysis of the research states, "Professional development exists in both rural and urban schools in varying degrees of quality, shaped by a myriad of forces, and resulting in some ultimate impact on teacher practice and student achievement. However, those forces are separate from the consideration of this research: whether the teachers work in an urban or rural setting, that aspect seemed to have no impact on the quality of professional development provided to teachers."

Quantitative Research Discussion

The quantitative, statistical data gleaned from a total of 107 teachers (90 urban, 17 rural) who took the electronic survey demonstrated that there is no statistical difference between the two groups' responses when looking at the means of each group. That is, what the rural teachers perceived regarding the professional development they were provided and what the urban teachers felt regarding the professional development they

were provided was similar. No issues of non-equity seemed to exist as evidenced by the quantitative data.

Limitations

Limitations of this research existed. First, this research used only four schools in attempting to glean teachers' perceptions. There are many rural schools in North Dakota that could have been used and that might have demonstrated different results. The same could be said about urban schools. This research is not generalizable in any substantial way. Secondly, only secondary teachers were interviewed and surveyed; different results might have emerged if elementary teachers had been included. Next, only eight teachers were interviewed, two from each of the four schools. Interviewing more teachers might have provided a clearer picture of the perceptions of the teachers in urban and rural schools in North Dakota in regards to professional development. It is important to note, too, that the selection of the teachers to be interviewed relied heavily on the principals in the four schools. Why the eight teachers were chosen by principals is unclear; the extent to which principals picked teachers who would be complimentary, or at least not overly negative, to the professional development program in their own school is unclear. Determining the principals' selection processes lies outside the purview of this research. Finally, this study is predicated on the actions of the North Dakota Legislature. Lawmakers in this state attempted to provide equity to funding – and to educational opportunity – between schools in this state only. This research is meant to describe professional development in selected North Dakota schools only, and is, therefore, not necessarily generalizable to other states.

Conclusions

A number of conclusions can be drawn from this research.

Urban vs. Rural

The distinction of being either an urban or rural school did not seem to play a part in the quality of professional development as measured by the perceptions of the teachers interviewed for this research. Despite the issues inherent in rural school professional development as identified in the review of literature, the data of this study does not indicate that equity issues exist between the urban and rural schools used in this research. Neither setting inherently provided for superior or inferior professional development as measured by the perceptions of the teachers in this research.

Two further conclusions seem reasonable as related to the general statement that the urban and rural schools did not provide inherently better or worse professional development for teachers. First, is it possible that teachers in rural schools have always perceived their professional development to be effective, beneficial, and worthwhile. If this were correct, then the remedies spelled out by the legislature would have been unnecessary. Secondly, it is also a reasonable conclusion, but not a certainty, that those measures taken by the legislature to provide equity in education in North Dakota have indeed had a positive effect. The legislature provided money to ensure equity between and among urban and rural schools. Furthermore, regional education associations were developed and were written into law to help with the equity issues between urban and rural schools. Either those remedies were unnecessary, or they were necessary and have consequently fixed equity issues in professional development.

Administrators' Impact

Emerging from the data of this research, the teachers' perceptions indicated that the administrators in schools played a large role in professional development, impacting professional development more than a rural or urban setting. The administrators in the four schools used in this research impacted professional development in terms of format, topics, content, and effectiveness in both urban and rural settings. While it appears that the administrators directed the professional development opportunities for faculty in varying degrees of top-down decision making, the impact of both district-level and school-level administrators on the opportunities was evident. It could be said that the effectiveness of professional development was less related to location of the school, and more related to the administration of the school.

Effective Professional Development

In relation to the professional literature in regards to what constitutes effective professional development, the teachers in both the urban and rural schools did not report participating in opportunities for professional learning that match that definition. Based on the perceptions of teachers, effective professional development as defined in the literature was not operating in schools. It did not matter if the school was urban or rural. There were glimpses of effective professional development, but there was no systematic implementation of a professional development model as promoted in the literature. That is not to say that teachers did not find what was offered useful or in some ways beneficial to students. Furthermore, PLCs were offered in some schools that certainly promoted professional development more consistent with the literature.

Regional Education Associations

In terms of opportunities provided by the regional education associations, the four teachers from the two rural schools were much more able to identify the offerings of and benefits of belonging to the associations. In fact, the urban teachers were aware of the associations, but they did not report to using their professional development services. It is unclear if, in terms of professional development, the urban schools and teachers receive any benefit from the regional education associations.

Perhaps the development of regional education associations was specifically targeted to address deficits in rural schools, with no explicit targeting of urban schools. This possibility is unclear. If that is indeed the situation, the development of the associations has been successful. Conversely, based on the responses of the urban teachers, they had no reason to use the professional development opportunities offered by the associations; they worked in large schools which provided their own professional development in varying formats and with varying content. The rural schools used the professional development provided by the regional education associations in varying amounts.

Professional Learning Communities

Professional Learning Communities, which employ the characteristics of effective professional development, were used sporadically throughout the four schools used in this research. Two of the schools, one urban and one rural, used PLCs in varying ways. The professional development professional literature identified characteristics of effective professional development, and PLCs appeared to be a modality in which those characteristics could be employed in a synergistic manner. It is not clear that those

schools that used PLCs utilized them in wholly beneficial ways, but it is clear that those schools that used PLCs did provide professional development that appeared to contain some effective professional development characteristics as perceived by the teachers.

Again, it must be noted that teachers' perceptions of the quality of the professional development received in their schools did not vary according to which schools used PLCs and which did not. In other words, teachers did not rate PLCs necessarily higher in either the qualitative or quantitative data in comparison to the non-PLC schools, although those teachers interviewed definitely articulated benefit received from their participation in PLCs.

Another possible conclusion that might be drawn is the possibility that rural schools perceive that the professional development provided to them is effective simply because they have no grounds for comparison. Teachers who have, for example, never experienced highly effective professional development might be satisfied with the professional development provided in their school. Perhaps rural teachers do not know what the possibilities are in terms of professional development. Perhaps they don't know what they don't know.

Instructional Coaching

Currently a best practice in the literature concerning professional development for teachers, at the time of this research instructional coaching was not being used in any of the studied schools. That is, none of the four used an instructional coach as part of their regular professional development regimen. Rural 1 had future plans for an instructional coach, but the faculty had not yet had the opportunity to measure the effectiveness of such.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions described above, a number of recommendations emerged.

For School Administrators

As the instructional leaders in the school, administrators should strive to present the most effective professional development possible. As such, a number of recommendations emerged:

1. Ask faculty. Seeking input from the faculty in schools in regards to professional development programming is always preferable to the alternative. The main complaints from the interviewees consistently centered around professional development that was dictated by administrators and that was therefore perceived as unhelpful.

2. Keep abreast. Administrators are encouraged to continue reading and remain knowledgeable of current best practices in professional development. PLCs and instructional coaching might never be part of the professional development regimen if the administrator is unaware of what the literature is discussing.

3. Keep moving. Move towards best practices in professional development as decisions are made and as a regimen is implemented. Rationalization of professional development decisions is often accepted by faculty, especially when there has been some administrator/teacher collaboration. For example, rationalize professional learning communities to your faculty and then implement them. Doing this would help to insure that professional development is effective, as defined in the literature.

4. Eliminate the short. Short single-session professional development opportunities were generally less effective than longer sessions. The literature regarding effective professional development does not support the use of these modalities. Furthermore, complaints from the teachers in this research often centered on the ineffectiveness of such professional development.

5. Stick to it. Teachers interviewed for this research indicated that they appreciated ongoing, long-term professional development. Conversely, some of the interviewees complained about a short focus of professional development, as their perception indicated that their administration provided training on a topic only to move on too quickly and with relatively little follow-through.

6. Utilize the regional education associations. This research did not indicate any inherent value to teachers or students if the school was a member of a regional education association, but it is possible that professional development could be improved by using the resources of the association. Administrators should identify and use the regional education associations in ways that benefit teachers and students.

For Teachers

Recommendations for teachers emerged as a result of this research.

1. Be vocal. Teachers should inform administrators what is useful and beneficial professional development. Similarly, they should identify what is not useful and what is not beneficial.

2. Continue to learn. All eight teachers interviewed for this research indicated that professional development had an impact on their teaching practices and,

ultimately, the academic achievement of their students. Believing in the value of professional development, no matter the content or the format, is important.

3. Be aware of best practices. Read professional literature in order to advise administrators in more helpful ways. One teacher interviewed for this research had never heard the term "Professional Learning Communities." Teachers should self-educate so they can be more effective in advocating for better professional development.

4. Develop yourself. Teachers in this research indicated that the best professional development they experienced was that which they chose. Teachers should continue to use additional non-contract opportunities as provided by the regional education association or school district to strengthen areas of weakness and to develop areas of lack.

For Future Research

Recommendations for future research emerged as a result of this research.

1. A study with additional urban and rural schools in North Dakota would provide a more solid understanding of professional development opportunities in urban and rural schools in this state, and any possible equity issues.

2. A study of elementary teachers' perceptions in urban and rural schools would provide a more solid understanding of professional development opportunities in urban and rural schools in this state, and any possible equity issues.

3. A study of rural teachers' perceptions in other states with a large rural school population might provide additional insights into issues regarding the professional development opportunities in rural schools nationwide.

4. A study of the attitudes about professional development of administrators in both

    urban and rural schools might provide additional insights into the decision-

    making process in regards to professional development, and the willingness of

    school and district administrators to offer professional development that is

    consistent with the characteristics of effective professional development as

    delineated in the scholarly literature.

APPENDICES

Appendix A
IRB Approval

REPORT OF ACTION: EXEMPT/EXPEDITED REVIEW
University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board

Date: 2/28/2013   Project Number: IRB-201303-256

Principal Investigator: Kana, T. Erik

Department: Teaching and Learning

Project Title: Teachers' Perceptions of Professional Development in Urban and Rural Schools in North Dakota

The above referenced project was reviewed by a designated member for the University's Institutional Review Board
on   March 5, 2013   and the following action was taken:

☒ Project approved. **Expedited Review** Category No.   6, 7
    Next scheduled review must be before: March 4, 2014
    ☒ Copies of the attached consent form with the IRB approval stamp dated   March 5, 2013
       must be used in obtaining consent for this study.

☐ Project approved. **Exempt Review** Category No.
    This approval is valid until _____ as long as approved procedures are followed. No
    periodic review scheduled unless so stated in the Remarks Section.

       ☐ Copies of the attached consent form with the IRB approval stamp dated _____
          must be used in obtaining consent for this study.

☐ Minor modifications required. The required corrections/additions must be submitted to RDC for review and
    approval. **This study may NOT be started UNTIL final IRB approval has been received.**

☐ Project approval **deferred. This study may not be started until final IRB approval has been received.**
    (See Remarks Section for further information.)

☐ Disapproved claim of exemption. This project requires Expedited or Full Board review. The Human Subjects
    Review Form must be filled out and submitted to the IRB for review.

☐ Proposed project is not human subjects research as defined under Federal regulations 45 CFR 46 or 21 CFR 50 and
    does not require IRB review.

          ☐ Not Research   ☐ Not Human Subject

PLEASE NOTE: Requested revisions for student proposals MUST include adviser's signature. All revisions
             MUST be highlighted and submitted to the IRB within 90 days of the above review date.

☒ Education Requirements Completed. (Project cannot be started until IRB education requirements are met.)

cc: Dr. Bonnie Gourneau

                                    _____   3/5/13
                                    Signature of Designated IRB Member   Date
                                    UND's Institutional Review Board

If the proposed project (clinical medical) is to be part of a research activity funded by a Federal Agency, a special assurance
statement or a completed 310 Form may be required. Contact RDC to obtain the required documents.

                                                                        (Revised 10/2006)

INFORMED CONSENT

TITLE: *Teachers' Perceptions of Professional Development in*

Urban and Rural Schools in North Dakota

PROJECT DIRECTOR: *T. Erik Kana*

PHONE # *(701) 770-3877*

DEPARTMENT: *UND/Teaching and Learning*

STATEMENT OF RESEARCH

A person who is to participate in the research must give his or her informed consent to such participation. This consent must be based on an understanding of the nature and risks of the research. This document provides information that is important for this understanding. Research projects include only subjects who choose to take part. Please take your time in making your decision as to whether to participate. If you have questions at any time, please ask.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

You are invited to participate in a research study about professional development for teachers because you are a teacher who has participated in professional development.

The purpose of this research study is to investigate teachers' perceptions of professional development in both urban and rural settings. The state of North Dakota has attempted to make education equitable in both settings, and this research hopes to determine if that equity is seen in the professional development in both urban and rural schools. Research says that quality professional development has the ability to improve a) teachers' instruction, and b) students' academic achievement ultimately. For this reason, high quality professional development is important, and this research hopes to determine if teachers believe it is being provided in both urban and rural schools.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL PARTICIPATE?

Eight people will take part in the interview portion of this study at four high schools across North Dakota, two urban and two rural. Furthermore, approximately 300 high school faculty members from those same high schools will be asked to complete an electronic survey.

HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THIS STUDY?

Your participation in the study will last until May 2013. The researcher will travel to you for an interview. Your interview will take approximately 60 minutes.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THIS STUDY?

The researcher will be administering an electronic survey to the faculty members of two rural high schools and two urban high schools. Additionally, two teachers from each of the four high schools will be interviewed.

 Nothing about this research study is considered experimental.

The interviews will be unstructured; the researcher will be ask questions regarding your experiences regarding professional development. Some questions will be planned and some will be formulated as a result of your answers to other questions.

You are not required to answer any question. If a question is asked that you'd rather not answer, you are welcome to decline.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF THE STUDY?

There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?

You may not benefit personally from being in this study. However, we hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study because this research will add to the knowledge base of professional development in general, rural vs. urban professional development in particular.

ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY

You are not required to participate in this study. If you choose to not participate in this study, there will be no negative consequences for you now or in the future.

WILL IT COST ME ANYTHING TO BE IN THIS STUDY?

You will not have any costs for being in this research study. It is anticipated that your interviews will be conducted at the high school in which you teach during the course of your normal school schedule.

WILL I BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATING?

You will not be paid for being in this research study.

WHO IS FUNDING THE STUDY?

The University of North Dakota and the research team are receiving no payments from other agencies, organizations, or companies to conduct this research study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The records of this study will be kept private to the extent permitted by law. In any report about this study that might be published, you will not be identified. Your study record may be reviewed by Government agencies, the UND Research Development and Compliance office, the Minot State University Institutional Review Board, and the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board.

Any information that is obtained in this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of storing documents used in transcribing and coding data separate and apart from documents that contain your name or signature. This consent form will be stored separately from the data and the researcher's analysis. After three years, all forms will be destroyed by shredding.

If we write a report or article about this study, we will describe the study results in a summarized manner so that you cannot be identified.

Your interview will be digitally recorded. Once the interview has been transcribed, the principal investigator will provide you a copy of the transcript for your review, and the recording will be erased. The transcribed interview will be held for the required three years and then destroyed by shredding. In those three years, only the IRB and the principal investigator will have access to the transcriptions.

IS THIS STUDY VOLUNTARY?

Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of North Dakota.

CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS?

The researcher conducting this study is Thomas Erik Kana. You may ask any questions you have now. If you later have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research please contact Thomas Erik Kana at (701) 770-3877. You may also contact the researcher's advisor at the University of North Dakota; Dr. Bonnie Gourneau's phone number is (701) 777-2920.

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, or if you have any concerns or complaints about the research, you may contact the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board at (701) 777-4279. Please call this number if you cannot reach research staff, or you wish to talk with someone else.

Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Subject's Name: _____

_____   _____
Signature of Subject   Date

I have discussed the above points with the subject or, where appropriate, with the subject's legally authorized representative.

_____   _____
Signature of Person Who Obtained Consent   Date

Appendix C
Survey

SURVEY FOR RURAL AND URBAN FACULTY MEMBERS

This is an anonymous survey. As such, do not write your name on the survey.

For how many years have you been a classroom teacher?

_____ 0 - 3 years

_____ 4 - 7 years

_____ 8 - 10 years

_____ 11 – 14 years

_____ 15 – 19 years

_____ 20 or more years

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

_____ Baccalaureate degree

_____ Master's degree

_____ Doctoral degree

_____ Other

In what general area do you teach primarily? (choose one)

( )English/LA/Reading

( )Mathematics

( )History/Social Studies/Social Sciences

( )Visual, Musical, or Dramatic Arts

( )Science

( )Business

( )Technology

( )Special Education

( )Physical Education/Health

( )Agriculture

( )Other

Apart from the professional development required and provided by your school district as part of your contract year, in how many additional hours of professional development did you participate during the 2011/2012 school year?

_____

The **professional development** I receive through my school/district:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1) Is generally high quality.	4	3	2	1
2) Is sustained over time, continued over multiple professional development sessions, perhaps over the course of a year or multiple years.	4	3	2	1
3) Provides opportunities to observe other teachers (colleagues either at your school or at other schools) teaching.	4	3	2	1
4) Provides opportunities for colleagues to observe me teaching in my classroom.	4	3	2	1
5) Provides opportunities to plan for classroom implementation of some aspect of the professional development.	4	3	2	1
6) Provides opportunities to review student work in concert with my department and/or grade level colleagues.	4	3	2	1
7) Provides opportunities for participants to talk, listen, share, and write.	4	3	2	1
8) Addresses my needs as a classroom teacher.	4	3	2	1
9) Contains content that is driven by data regarding student achievement at your school.	4	3	2	1
10) Helps improve student academic achievement.	4	3	2	1
11) Supports or strengthens the ongoing instructional program of our school.	4	3	2	1

Appendix D

Codes, Categories, Themes, And Assertions Cultivated During Data Analysis

Codes	Categories	Themes	Assertion
Urban PD Rural PD	PD provided in schools	Schools and school districts provide PD for varying reasons and with varying degrees of success.	Professional development exists in both rural and urban schools in varying degrees of quality, shaped by a myriad of forces, and resulting in some ultimate impact on teacher practice and student achievement. However, those forces are separate from the consideration of this research: urban or rural setting, which seems to have no impact on the quality of professional development provided to teachers.
Sustained over time Active learning Supports the current instructional program Teacher Collaboration	Effective PD	Teachers experience professional development that fits the definition of effective professional development in the literature.	
District-level decisions School-level decisions	PD decision making	Various people at the district and school level make PD decisions with varying teacher support/agreement.	
Targeted PD Improved Academic Achievement Changing beliefs or practices	PD's relation to teaching and learning	Teachers perceive that oftentimes PD is directly related to teaching and learning.	
PD purposes Self Selected PD	PD is personal	Teachers use PD as a personal enterprise to help them meet both implicit and explicit goals for student learning.	
Activities of PLC Value of PLC	PLC's as PD	PLC's are used as PD in varying formats and to varying degrees of success.	

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