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Policy to Practice:

The Perspectives of Teachers and Administrators on the Implementation of Common
Core Utilizing Action Research to Design a Professional Development Model

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

by

Adaina Elizabeth Brown

2016

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Policy to Practice:

The Perspectives of Teachers and Administrators on the Implementation of Common
Core Utilizing Action Research to Design a Professional Development Model

by

Adaina Elizabeth Brown

Doctor of Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2016

Professor Robert Cooper, Co-Chair

Professor Eugene Tucker, Co-Chair

This traditional form of action research project, based on the work of Kurt Lewin (Coghlan, D. and Brannick, T., 2007), addresses the problem of how to make professional development effective for teachers and implement instructional strategies in all content areas as we move into the Common Core reform movement. The research was conducted at a middle school within a large urban school district located in Southern California and the participants consisted of 56 teachers, three counselors, seven coordinators, and four administrators. The research design consisted of mixed methods in order to provide an analysis of the experiences of teachers and administrators during the implementation of a professional development model that consisted of

four 5-week cycles. The secondary data analysis looked at the effects of the model on participant perception and pedagogy. The professional development model data was gathered using surveys prior to the start and at the end of the professional development model, post-professional development reflections, post cycle reflections, Instructional Leadership team (ILT) observations, interviews, and focus groups. Data was analyzed by identifying trends and themes in reflections and participant responses. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the relationship among the observations, surveys, and professional development evaluations. The action research findings showed that based on the experiences of teachers and ILT members, time, communication, collaboration, accountability, and best practices were the five major themes that stood out as strengths and weaknesses of the model. In regards to the necessary components of effective professional development, the six themes that emerged were professional delivery method, observations, feedback, reflection, profession development scaffolding, and common planning time. The last finding showed the professional development model had the following impact on teaching: an increase in use of instructional strategies with regards to reading, writing, and discussion; increase in creation and use of departmental rubrics and assessments; and an increase in departmental lesson planning. Although there was variance among the sample sizes for the quantitative data, the triangulation of the data sources revealed that the professional development model was relevant to each content area, personalized, and created a unified focus for Common Core implementation.

The dissertation of Adaina Elizabeth Brown is approved.

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DEDICATION PAGE

I give this manuscript as a gift to my father, John Anderson, and my mother, Shirley Anderson, who always supported me through all my endeavors. My father's persistent nature, allowed me to keep moving forward knowing that no matter how many doors closed on my path, eventually I would arrive at an open door. My mother's truth and calm nature, allowed me to see things for what they were and in the midst of any storm, keep calm and pray. Everything that I have accomplished and all that I aspire to be is a direct reflection of my parents' continuous love and support. Thank you Mom and Dad.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In every state across the nation, there exists an achievement gap in literacy and mathematics between wealthy students and students living in poverty. Over the last decade, policymakers and educators have launched reform efforts such as Goals 2000, No Child Left Behind, and Race to the Top, to improve education; specifically focused on standards based curriculum and pedagogy (Garet, M.S., Porter, A.C., Desimone, L., Birman, B.F., & Yoon, K.S., 2001). In August 2010, the California State Board of Education joined 46 states in adopting the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics for the 6.2 millions of K-12 public school students in California (CCSESA, 2013).

The nationwide goal was that Common Core would be fully implemented by the 2014-2015 school year, meaning districts, schools, and teachers would be fully prepared to put new standards into practice in all content areas with new curriculum based on a new way of teaching and learning (Gewertz, C., 2012). As the nation transitions to a more robust set of standards of what students must know and do to be ready for college and career, Common Core requires a shift in expectations and teacher practice (Marrongelle, K. Sztajn, P. & Smith, M., 2013). Professional development is necessary to train teachers and modify current teaching approaches in ways that reflect the focus and depth of Common Core (Conley, D.T., 2014). Professional development in the form of action research is the shift required to support teachers in their own learning; create a sense of empowerment rather than being overwhelmed; and, create a culture of school site sustainability where teachers become active participants instead of merely an attendee at the professional development (Ado, K., 2013).

Statement of the Problem

The problem we faced as a nation in terms of Common Core implementation was that teachers were not prepared to confidently teach fewer standards that required more coverage (Ash, K., 2012). In addition, there was no set curriculum and no data yet available to determine if we were on target for impacting student learning through Common Core.

Based on past and current research, schools nationwide lack a cohesive curriculum that is aligned to the Common Core standards, thus making it difficult for teachers to effectively prepare for Common Core implementation in the classroom and for schools to develop a focus for professional development (Gulamhussein, A., 2013).

Novice and veteran teachers have undergone much professional development to meet the expectations of reform. Researchers have shown that effective professional development must consist of cohesion and alignment to school-site goals, collaboration, feedback, and sufficient time for implementation (Corcoran, T., 1995; Guskey, T.R. & Yoon, K.S., 2009; Poekert, P., 2012); however, few studies have shown the effects of professional development in the form of action research as it pertains to reform. Professional development is often connected to the priorities of the schools, districts, and state initiatives rather than focused on teacher effectiveness (Harnett, J., 2012). Action researchers define effective professional development as teacher-led professional development, whereby teachers engage in cyclical and reflective practices. The findings belong to the participants and revolve around theories of change and change in practice (Coglan D., and Brannick, T., 2007). Traditional forms of professional development do not address the theoretical frameworks of action research (Harnett, J., 2012) such as communities of practice, adult learning theory, reflective teacher development, and espoused theory vs. theory in use, to name a few. Action research centered on theoretical

frameworks lead to an understanding of why something is happening (Coghlan and Brannick, 2007). Professional development without action research causes the participants to operate on singular level, under a narrow lens, which is devoid of collaboration and reflection (Taylor, A., Puchner, L., Powell, M., Harris, V., and Marshall, R., 2012).

This study focused on professional development in the form of action research and how teachers and members of the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) as active participants in the process implement Common Core. The study attempted to redefine instructional goals with relation to Common Core and show how a more complex level of professional development in the form of action research can change teacher practice. Through the professional development model, teachers delivered and received content specific professional development, engaged in peer observations, and used data and artifacts to reflect on the process, in order to show that consistent implementation, and not reform alone, will create the gains that Common Core is meant to produce. The following research questions served as a guide for my study:

1. What are the experiences of teachers as they participated in action research to design a professional development model?
2. What are the experiences of ILT members as they participated in action research to design a professional development model?
3. In the perceptions of teachers and ILT members, what are the necessary components of an effective professional development model?
4. According to teachers, how did the professional development model design by action research influence their teaching?
 - 4.1 How did it influence teaching by guiding reflective practice as part of transformative learning?

- 4.2 How did it influence teaching by encouraging teacher collaboration?
- 4.3 How did it influence teaching by changing teacher perceptions about teaching reading, writing, and discussion in their content area?
- 4.4 How did it influence changes in their teaching practice?

Background

Since August 2010, school districts throughout the nation have been determining the best approach for their teachers, their students, and their stakeholders for transitioning from the 1997 state standards to the CCSS. Little information exists from schools, districts, and states about the various approaches, the successes, and the challenges associated with implementation of CCSS. Over the last several years, the demand for improving the quality of teaching and learning and the increasing demand for accountability have put issues related to effective professional development high on the agenda of educators, researchers, and policy makers (Antoniou, P. & Kyriakides, L., 2013). If professional development is used as a tool for implementing Common Core, the focus must shift to updating teachers' professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes; as a result, teachers will be prepared to lead the change and promote student learning (Steyn, G.M., 2005; Marrongelle, et.al., 2013).

In the past, at a time of new reform, professional development has been generic, one-day workshops to fit the goals of the new reform (Darling-Hammond, L. 2009; Guskey and Yoon, 2009). Professional development had a prescribed type of delivery and was not tailored to meet the needs of each stakeholder. Many types of professional development have been offered: summer, year round, virtual meetings, in and away from school; however, these features were not enough to be considered effective (Garet et al., 2001). The suggested format for professional

development in terms of Common Core implementation must offer teachers feedback on their own knowledge, instruction, and their students' progress (Finn, C.E. & Petrilli, M.J., 2010).

Professional development for teachers must be ongoing and deep because the Common Core movement shifts from a scripted curriculum, which was the focus of *No Child Left Behind*, to a student-centered curriculum where teachers facilitate student learning based on the new instructional shifts in literacy and math (Mathis, W.J., 2010). The shift will take time, but it can rejuvenate teachers. Implementation of Common Core requires teachers have a deep understanding and knowledge that cannot be accomplished through quick hit training (Liebtag, E., 2013).

In planning effective professional developments, educators need to first ask the question of whether or not the approaches they are using are supported by research which have led to improved teacher quality and student achievement (Guskey & Yoon, 2009). Guskey and Yoon (2009) point out that over 1300 studies address the effect of professional development on learning outcomes. Planning effective professional development with regards to past research and case studies will make the results of future professional development more meaningful and credible (Hill, H.C., Beisiegel, M., & Jacob, R., 2013).

All of the studies recognize the importance of professional development as it pertains to student achievement and teacher effectiveness. The next step is for studies to more closely examine the culture of the school and the learning processes that need to improve. Schools need to be given resources that allow struggling students to succeed and teachers need to be consistently trained on how to improve classroom instruction (Kanold, T. and Ebert, J., 2010; Hill, et al., 2013; Ado, K., 2013). As teachers develop deeper skill sets and increase confidence in their practice, they will be more willing to work together, have reflective conversations, and

reach sustainability of professional development topics and strategies long after the professional development is over. A meta-analysis was performed by Marzano, R.J, Pickering, D.J., & Pollock, J.E. (2001) to analyze instructional strategies used by teachers that have the greatest impact on student achievement. These instructional strategies were organized into nine categories. Further research done by Silver, H.F., Dewing, R.T., & Perini, M.J. (2012) on these instructional strategies has shown them to be productive in the implementation of Common Core.

The major studies mentioned previously are a clear indication that a Common Core implementation framework is needed because teachers have to learn new ways to teach like they have never experienced themselves and that they rarely see their colleagues engage in (Ado, 2013); however, creating this type of teacher development is one of the biggest challenges school and districts face with CCSS implementation. According to Linda Darling-Hammond (2012), professional development was the most important focus of New York City School District #2 in raising student achievement; however, the major problem of Common Core implementation was that teacher development was not the most important focus of CCSS (Liebttag, E., 2013). The micro-level problem, at specific schools sites, mirroring the broad problem, is that schools' lack instructional leadership teams (ILT) or cabinets to even begin to address the issue of implementation (Edwards, B and Gammell, G., 2016). Principals have either incomplete teams or people that have been called together as a team without the necessary tools of how to build capacity or coach teachers.

As we move into a new area of reform, Common Core, teachers must learn how to implement instructional strategies in all content areas that support the reform. Many studies have sought to find out how the implementation of professional development can be effective for teachers and have determined that professional development is considered to be effective when it

is sustainable, creates a cycle of reflection and growth, and elicits ongoing collaboration among teachers (Steyn, G.M., 2005; Guskey, T., 2009; Putman, et al., 2009; Jacobs, J., Koellner, K., and Funderburk, J., 2012). My study sought to understand how cycles of professional development in the form of action research affect teacher quality of instruction that may lead to increased student achievement. The goal of my action research study was to align teachers' beliefs with their actions, so they can begin to reflect on what they think and how their thought processes guide what they do in order to increase teacher effectiveness (Aspen Institute, 2013; CCSESA, 2013; Kober, N. and Rentner, D.S., 2011; Gulamhussein, A., 2013; Fishman, B.J., Marx, R.W., Best, S., and Tal, R.T., 2003; Sztajn, P., Marongelle, K., Smith, P., Melton, B., 2012). The focus of the study was on a professional development cycle that defined instructional goals school wide; used action research and professional development to build teacher capacity; incorporated reading, writing, and discussion in all content areas with the potential to ultimately affect teacher quality of instruction and build collaborative relationships.

Overview of the Research Design

Site Description

The research was conducted at a middle school within a large urban school district located in Southern California. It is located in a city that is considered one of the top 20 most diverse in the nation. The middle school includes grades six through eight with a population of 1450 students. The student racial/ethnic distribution at the school are 64% Latino, 26% Black, 6% Asian, 1% Pacific Islander and 2% White. The school has a School for Advance Studies (SAS)¹, a Math/Science Magnet program, an AVID (Advancement via Individual Determination)

¹ SAS is a specialized program for students who have been identified gifted by the district in which they take honors or accelerated courses that are taught by SAS trained teachers to differentiate the core curriculum to meet the needs of all students. AVID is a sixth through twelfth grade system to prepare students in the academic middle for four-year college eligibility and success. It has a proven record in bringing out the best in students and closing the achievement gap. The goal of AVID is to provide students with high expectations, encouragement, day-to-day help through the AVID elective class, and a vision of college as an attainable goal.

program, and a largely diverse special education population. The API² of the school was 724 (based on the 2012-2013 school year), with only 40.3% of the students scoring proficient and/or advanced in English and 34.9% scoring proficient and/or advanced in mathematics on the state standardized exams; 64.4% of students attended school 96% of the time; and 65% of the students qualify for free and reduced lunch. Over the past five years, there has been very little growth in student proficiency in English Language Arts and mathematics, leaving the school stagnant in terms of academic progress and teacher growth.

Research Design

The study used an action research design with multiple research methods and analyzed qualitative and quantitative measures in a single study. This allowed for the triangulation of multiple data sources in order for the results from one method to inform the results of another method (Creswell, 2003). Since there are five data collection methods, quantitative and qualitative measures are necessary to best inform the results of the study. The qualitative results are based on the teacher post-professional development evaluations, the teacher post cycle reflections, teacher and administrator focus groups, and teacher and administrator interviews. The quantitative analysis is based on the professional development survey that was conducted prior to the action research cycles and at the conclusion of the cycles and the post-professional development evaluations that were conducted at the conclusion of each whole group professional development.

² Academic Performance Index used by the state to measure a schools academic performance and growth based a variety of academic measures. Numeric API score ranges from a low of 200 to a high of 1000. The interim statewide API performance target for all schools is 800. A school's growth is measured by how well it is moving toward or past that goal. An API score is calculated for all students in a school as well as numerous API scores for each subgroup at the school (such as by race, English Learner Status, students with disabilities, and socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils)

Research Methods

The action research project covered four 5-week cycles (Figure 1.1) where each department was responsible for the implementation of the Common Core instructional strategies and measured the change in teacher perception and instructional pedagogy with regards to teaching reading, writing, and discussion in English, math, science, history, electives, physical education, special education. Prior to the roll out of the first cycle with the staff, the ILT met to discuss staff expectations, set norms for observations that took place throughout the cycles, and the timeline for each cycle. The ILT presented the expectations to the staff and the instructional strategies in order to provide guidance and planning time before each cycle. The departments also met with various members of the ILT leading the meetings in order to ensure that there were no questions or concerns regarding the rollout of the cycles.

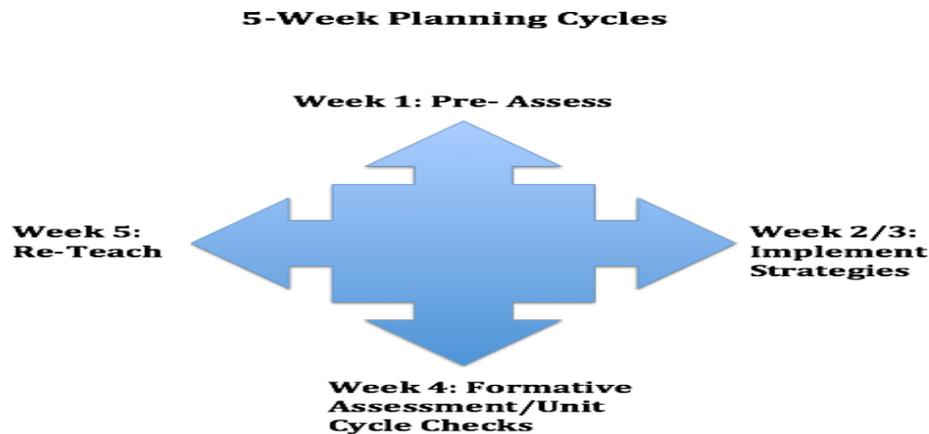


Figure 1.1 Outline of Five-Week Action Research Cycle

Survey. The researcher worked with the ILT to develop and conduct a pre- and post-professional development survey that was administered to all staff. The survey consisted of 15 questions and was administered electronically. The results from the survey were used to assist the ILT in presenting professional development activities that incorporated the instructional strategies and also met the learning needs of the teachers.

Post-Professional Development Evaluations. The members of the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) chose three research-based instructional strategies that were aligned with Common Core implementation and addressed reading, writing, and discussion techniques. The three instructional strategies became the focus of the professional development topics for the 2015-2016 school year.

Once each cycle began, the teachers met once a week either in grade level meetings, department meetings, or for whole group professional development meetings. The post-professional development evaluations were completed at the end of each professional development meeting and were used to inform the ILT how the professional development met the instructional needs of the teachers and how and when each department planned to implement the presented strategies.

Observations. The ILT team observed each teacher once per cycle to provide feedback regarding the lessons and implementation of the strategies. Observations were performed in teams and were recorded using an observation template designed by the ILT members. The observations were used to guide reflective conversations within the department meetings, plan for upcoming professional developments, and adjust within the cycle and the subsequent cycles.

Post Cycle Reflections. Each cycle lasted five weeks with the last week dedicated to a unit-culminating project or assessment. The teachers developed formative assessments and rubrics for

students that were common within grade level and content and met in order to use their data to guide next steps in terms of instruction and adjust their implementation as necessary. The teachers also completed post cycle reflections at the end of each cycle.

Focus Groups and Interviews. All teachers and ILT members were asked via email to participate in focus groups and interviews. Fourteen teachers, two instructional coaches, and three administrators responded via email to participate in the focus group and interviews. The information was used to provide more detailed data regarding the professional development cycle implementation, change in perception and pedagogy, and teacher and administrator input regarding the process.

Post Cycle Adjustments. Over the course of each cycle, the teachers attended four whole group professional developments meetings to reinforce the instructional strategies; observed the strategies in action by their colleagues; and provided feedback on the implementation of the strategies within each cycle via surveys and evaluations. The teachers used artifacts to provide evidence of student work and assessments to continue to plan and adjust planning within each cycle.

At the end of the each cycle, the data was used to inform the teachers, the departments, and the ILT about the implementation process as it pertained to Common Core through sustained and continuous professional development in the form of action research. This information was used to inform planning as the school moved into the subsequent cycles over the course of the 2015-2016 school year.

Significance of the Research

The significance of the study was to help school leaders design professional development programs that can assist teachers successfully implement Common Core standards to improve

teaching and student learning. This project also informed the ILT on how to develop effective professional developments for teachers and informed teachers on how to use data to improve their teaching practice and student learning.

The problem is significant because with every new reform initiative, there is no implementation cycle or training that is sustainable as we move into new accountabilities with high expectations; however, teachers are left feeling unprepared and held accountable for student success.

The elements and criteria I used to determine the significance were that with past reform, professional development was reform specific, lacked a focus, and failed to develop a culture of professionalism within schools (Guskey, T., 2009; Hill, et. al., 2013). My study was designed to produce a desired result in teachers, students, administrators, and overall, change the culture of teaching and learning. The purpose of action research is not to just describe the problem nor explain it but to change the problem (Coghlan & Brannick, 2007). This paradigm shift addresses the way we think and behave which ultimately leads to replacing old habits with new ones.

The audience I will address with the results of my research is the local superintendent and principals within their networks in order to show them how to design a professional development framework across multiple sites that will support Common Core implementation, teacher growth and development, and strengthen their Instructional Leadership teams within their school sites.

Summary

Overall, the study measured the effects of the professional development model in the form of action research on Common Core implementation. The study examined how action research redefined the role of the teacher in terms of effective professional development; how the professional development cycles directly affected teacher instruction and student achievement;

and, how professional development can be used to reteach our teachers how to implement instructional strategies that will teach our students how to read, write, and discuss in order to be college and career ready.

The literature review in Chapter Two provides the background of reform in the context of Common Core and outlines the implications of Common Core. The chapter also examines the inadequacies of past and present professional development and presents the framework for effective professional development in the form of action research. Chapter Three provides an in depth look at the research design of the study. Chapter Four discusses the quantitative and qualitative findings of the study. Lastly, Chapter Five links the key findings to the existing literature, discusses implications of the findings as they address the theoretical frameworks, outlines the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research based on the findings.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

As of Fall 2014, 43 states had adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), which required a shift in student expectations and teacher practice (Marrongelle, K., Sztajn, P., & Smith, M., 2013). Nationwide teachers were facing a problem of trying to implement Common Core State Standards without proper training.

The implementation was rushed around the nation and millions of dollars were spent on curriculum and assessments that were “Common Core” aligned. Lesson plans were not available and teachers were forced to teach lessons on Common Core standards for which they had not been trained (Warren, P. and Murphy, P., 2014). During the 2013-2014 school year, in two states where implementation took place, students were tested on things that had not yet been taught (Menzel, C., 2014).

Standards and curriculum had not been aligned yet. Only the math frameworks had been approved and they were only partially aligned to the new standards (Posnick-Goodwin, S., 2014). The ELA frameworks have not yet been approved and textbooks will not be released until the 2016 school year (Heitin, L., 2015).

Teachers were left feeling unprepared, overwhelmed and improperly trained on how to teach reading, writing, and questioning in content specific areas. Insufficient and, in some cases, ineffective professional development for teachers is a problem that has plagued reform for decades (Kober, et. al., 2011); however, the introduction of CCSS raised the bar for the type and quality of professional development that teachers have needed. In the context of this action research, the new Common Core State Standards are different from any past reform in that teachers are being asked to teach skills and strategies that they themselves have never learned (Liebttag, E., 2013). This literature review provides the background to past and present reform

efforts that have attempted to raise expectations for teachers and students and how in response, educators are being asked to change the way they teach, learn new skills, and deepen their content knowledge without adequate professional development.

I begin my literature review by addressing the historical background of reform in the context of Common Core. Second, I address the Common Core State Standards movement and what it means for teachers and students. Third, I review past and current professional development and their inadequacies in terms of meeting the needs of teachers and Common Core demands. Fourth, I present the theoretical concepts as they shape effective professional development in the form of action research such as pedagogical content knowledge, adult learning, collaboration, and reflective practice. Lastly, I address the gaps in the literature and how my study is an intersection of the four concepts. The conclusion draws implications from the literature: that effective professional development will affect the success of Common Core implementation and a national framework must be designed to combine the aforementioned theoretical constructs to ensure the transformation of teaching and learning.

Past Reform

In 1892, the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) signed by President Eisenhower did not emphasize equal quality education for all students. The focus was to increase college graduation rates in order to be more globally competitive with countries like the Soviet Union (Wallender, J., 2014). American schools were not globally competitive and deemed inadequate.

Educational reforms over the last sixty years have attempted to improve student achievement and teacher quality (Poekert, P.E., 2012). The introduction of the Elementary and the Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965, as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty campaign, demanded equal access to education for all children (Michael Putman, S.,

Smith, L.L., & Cassady, J.C., 2009) and its sole purpose was to improve academic achievement for the nation's most disadvantaged students. The Elementary Secondary Education Act (ESEA) also attempted to provide quality education for students but lacked rigor in American schools and provided a quality education for all students at the expense of lowered academic standards (Mathis, W. J., 2010).

In 1983, *A Nation at Risk* addressed the failures of the American educational system and also provided recommendations for improvement in order to increase student achievement as a nation (Liebtag, E., 2013). The recommendations were explicit about high levels of shared education and launched the standards based education movement with individual state standards and assessments. Individual states were left to define what students should know and be able to do (Lefkowitz, L. and Miller, K., 2006).

In 2001, ESEA was reauthorized and renamed by President George Bush as No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). NCLB distributed Title I funds to schools and school districts with a high percentage of students from low income families. It also refocused reform on reading, dropout prevention, school improvement, and mandatory professional development (Michael Putman, et al., 2009). Mandatory professional development through Title II funds were allocated to ensure that all teachers were highly qualified and that all students achieved at high levels (Guskey, T., 2003; Desimone, L.M., Porter, A.C., Garet, M.S., Yoon, K.S., Birman, B.F., 2002). NCLB brought stronger curriculum and standards based education but not common accountabilities (Wallender, J., 2014). NCLB was the largest federal attempt to address concerns of *A Nation at Risk* and reform education practices but had questionable success (Liebtag, E., 2013). NCLB had a clearly defined role and meaning of equity. It emphasized the relationship between achievement and socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, language or disability. NCLB created a

highly fragmented decentralized system of US education and vast differences in educational expectations existed across states (Conley, D.T., 2014; Kornhaber, M.L., Griffith, K., Tyler, A., 2014). There were too many different accountability systems with each state determining proficiency levels and these left wide gaps in expectations for rigor and student achievement throughout the nation (Wallender, J., 2014).

The No Child Left Behind reform of 2002 failed to close the achievement gap between white and non-white students (Strauss, V., 2014). There was an unrealistic expectation set that all students would be proficient in English and Math by 2014; schools would be measured by their “adequate yearly progress” or AYP; and penalties were imposed for schools that did not meet AYP (Jost, K., 2010). There were separate resources allocated to various schools; in addition, different levels of expectations among states, challenges the inequity posed with students moving from state to state and falling behind, and all of these things continued to widen the achievement gap without looking at the real underlying issues of why are students are failing (Morial, M., 2014; Powers, K. n.d). We needed to address the fact that there were other factors that contributed to the achievement gap other than test scores (Strauss, V., 2013; Ravitch, D., 2011). The imposition of a federal accountability system in a bureaucratic society is ineffective in achieving quality education for all children (Schlechty, P.C., 2009). The long tradition of local control (McDonnell, L.M., and Weatherford, M.S., 2013) combined with the uneven quality of state standards and state assessments represent the inequity that our students face across the nation. NCLB sharpened our attention to the achievement gap (Wong, K.K., 2013).

Teachers felt that with the old standards they had to teach them all in order for the students to be successful on the state assessments and teachers were rushing through the content (Posnick-Goodwin, S. 2014). The old standards were about testing and not learning. With NCLB and the

old standards, testing drove instruction. Compliance based learning where children follow directions to complete tasks without engaging deeply in what they are learning is never going to close the achievement gap (Conley, 2014). The old standards enforced a lot of top down control, pacing guides, and accountability mandates. Common Core is not bound to an accountability system that requires districts and schools to attend to such socio-demographic variation (Kornhaber, et al., 2014).

Education reform sent the teaching profession into reactive mode since 2011 based on the changes to teacher education and how it intersects with reform (Wiseman, D.L., 2012). Past reform has failed to provide strong teacher preparation, student engagement with the curriculum and preparation for the assessments (Marrongelle, et al., 2013); however, it has led to renewed interest among researchers to identify how professional development can best support teachers in improving instructional practice (Michael Putman, et al., 2009).

In terms of professional development, there were pockets of success and excellence but past reforms struggled to bring small-scale professional development projects to larger scale (Ado, 2013). Every year, money has been spent on professional development with no clear effect and professional development is not embedded in classroom teaching, which in the long term effects student learning (Marrongelle, et al., 2013).

The most recent education reform is the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) initiative, which is state led and designed to create a nationwide standards-based curriculum. The goal of CCSS is to increase the level of student preparedness, on a national scale, with which students enter post-secondary opportunities (Marrongelle, et. al., 2013). CCSS are not a curriculum and teachers will need strong preparation and implementation via professional development for this

immediate transition because in its absence, CCSS will result in more disappointments (Marrongelle, et al., 2013) to school reform efforts.

Common Core Reform and the Six Shifts

Common Core is the biggest shift in education since 1999 when California adopted the highest standards in the nation; however, schools could teach to whatever standards they wanted in no particular order and in whatever grade level they saw fit (McDonnell, L.M. and Weatherford, M.S., 2013). For example, long division could be taught in fourth, fifth or sixth grade, depending on the district. The United States continued to fall behind other countries in the resource that matters most in the global economy, human capital. The achievement gap among United States students from different socioeconomic backgrounds is noted as one of the most unequal countries as documented by test scores (McDonnell L.M. and Weatherford, M.S., 2013).

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were released in 2010 by a group of Governors, P-16 educators, and legislators, who had a vision to plan backwards and start addressing what our students need to know and be able to do to be college and career ready (Haskins, R., Murnane, R., Sawhill, I.V., Snow, C., 2012). Higher education constituents, along with state politicians, and members of the K-12 community developed standards for reading, literacy and math. The standards scaffold the content students should master in each grade level with the necessary literacy skills, critical thinking skills, and reasoning skills (Kirwan, E., White, T., Zimpher, N., 2014). Some politicians, educators, and parents believe that the Common Core is just another political agenda designed to force reform on educators in a hopeless attempt to provide education equity without getting to the real problem of poverty and socioeconomic inequities. Common Core was designed to close the preparation gap that our students have when entering school at any level of K-16 (Kirwan, et al., 2014). For the first time in the nation's

history, we have national standards and 46 states were a part of the initial adoption of the CCSS (Posnick-Goodwin, S., 2014). Currently, Common Core has been adopted by 43 states to address the gaps that our students have in terms of literacy and math (Haskins, et al., 2012).

The goal of CCSS is to ensure that students from grades K-12 are equipped with skills necessary to compete globally. Common Core allows the teachers to teach the standards and not focus on assessments as the one true measure of learning (Posnick-Goodwin, S., 2014). Teachers are now held accountable for standards that are fewer in number and are more coherent and reflect systematic input from colleagues. Teachers can now teach slower as they focus on fewer standards. The new standards inform the teachers what students need to know but allow the teachers the flexibility and creativity on how to teach them.

The CCSS entered full implementation phase at the start of the 2014-15 school year (Warren, P. and Murphy, P., 2014). By fall 2014, teachers had to fully implement CCSS. The new standards not only changed what teachers taught, but how they should teach it. We are asking students to move from rote memorization and just knowing the right answers to explaining their answer. CCSS is a national effort to establish shared K-12 math and ELA standards across multiple states (McDonnell and Weatherford, 2013).

The new standards cover fewer topics at each grade but require deeper understanding and anchor primary and secondary education across the states in one set of demanding standards. This a major contrast to the previous standards created under NCLB, which were more standards at lower levels of rigor. The standards are internationally benchmarked, which prepare all students for further learning and work in a competitive global economy regardless of socio-demographic variation associated with their “zip code” (Kornhaber, et al., 2014). The emphasis is placed on conceptual understanding and problem solving, stress reading and informational

text, promote a deeper understanding of mathematical concepts and the use of skills, and provide parents and teachers with a clear understanding of what students are expected to learn no matter where students live or what school they attend.

In ELA, the standards have less of an emphasis on fiction and a greater emphasis on informational text. Students must provide evidence from what they have read, use text to support their claim and provide reasoning or rationale to their claim. The content is aligned across grade levels and within grade levels. Students are required to listen and speak within each content area and within each grade level, collaboratively, and use technology for project based learning which will prepare them for college and career.

The Common Core standards are designed to increase academic rigor in all schools on a global level in terms of and create an end goal of college and career readiness for all which will lead to increased employment opportunities. The CCSS provides the opportunity to increase the percentage of students who graduate high school, reduce the percentage of students who need remediation in college, and provide access to college curricula to better support student persistence and success in higher education (Marrongelle, K., Sztajn, P., & Smith, M., 2013; Kornhaber, M.L., Griffith, K., Tyler, A., 2014).

In an attempt to address the achievement gap, Common Core ensures that all students have access to an education that enables them to be successful in a rapidly changing economy and society (Conley, D.T., 2014). It has been defined as a comprehensive strategy to make more students fully ready for college and careers by transforming teaching and learning (Liebtag, E., 2013). CCSS attempts to provide equitable chances for all students to learn and demonstrate success and provide a chance to raise the bar for teacher education. Common Core is about new standards and not standardization. We cannot continue to remain silent about the wide gaps that

exist from student to student. Silence is a form of acceptance and we cannot continue to simply manage instruction; we need to lead instructional practices to higher levels of rigor while providing scaffolds for students whose skills need remediation.

The only way to close the achievement gap is to offer all students a rigorous curriculum that provides them with equal opportunity to access the education (Young, W., 2013). Common standards are not the only vehicle that students need in order to have access to an equal education. Students must have quality teachers who provide quality instruction for several consecutive years (Haskins, et al., 2012). Good teaching is a key factor although it accounts for only 10 to 15 percent of student learning. We must continue to invest in increased teacher training, and implement sufficient time for instructional planning. Additionally, teachers need to observe effective models of instruction and internalize strategic methods that will maximize student growth. Studies show that when students have strong teachers, their learning increases, as do their test scores, and their life outcomes improve. As evidenced by the 2014 trial of Vergara lawsuit v California (Biegel, S., 2014), schools in high poverty areas often lack the effective teachers because they are not attractive; they lack strong leadership, a culture of collaboration, and resources. Also, students in poverty begin kindergarten with half the listening and speaking vocabulary skills that middle class students possess. They also enter with a deficit in background knowledge. The Common Core literacy standards addresses this deficit in all content areas by introducing students to informational text, new vocabulary, and bridging fiction with non fiction (Powers, K., n.d.). Marzano and David (2012) suggests Common Core instruction will narrow the gap in poverty because Common Core supports all learners regardless of where they come from, when teachers use targeted instructional strategies that support student learning (Powers, n.d.).

If Common Core fails, it will not be due to a lack of buy-in or because the standards were too difficult; the reason will be because of poor implementation surrounding CCSS, the curriculum, and the assessments (Klein, K., 2014). The valid complaints that supported the writing of the CCSS by the NGAS was enough to move the nation to a national standards movement and organized a clear vision as to how to close the achievement gap and create equity. The failure to change teacher perception, pedagogy, and student achievement, with regards to Common Core, comes with too many uncertainties and loose ends not being considered prior to full implementation in 2014-2015. The failure in New York and Kentucky schools resulted because assessments were introduced prior to making sure the teachers were prepared. The attempt to change the test before instruction was altered while still maintaining high student expectations was a recipe for disaster (Schurmann, P., 2013).

We cannot allow the achievement gap to widen during implementation as states and districts are left to decide on new curriculum, upgrade their technology with limited resources, measure success of the new standards with formative assessments that do not reflect the new assessment system, and design effective professional development that will address the needs of Common Core (Klein, K., 2014).

Challenges with Past Professional Development and Reform

Past and current professional development for teachers has been unfocused, fragmented, and consists of activities that do not lead to change (Corcoran, T.B., 1995). The lone act of changing policy will not result in improved teacher quality and instruction (Michael Putman, et al., 2009). Research on the implementation and effects of reform are often summarized by surveys and interviews of teachers with no real connection to changes in instruction or student achievement (Poekert, P.E., 2012). In contrast, effective professional development which

focused on improving teacher quality and student achievement, Tournaki et al. (2011) found there have been three main dilemmas of ineffective professional development: “one shot workshops” which focus on traditional activities such as management, discipline, or administrative issues; the pressure of school leaders to implement reform at their school sites before teachers are trained; and, the lack of teachers’ commitment to change their instructional practice.

Professional development needs to change the mindset of teachers if they are going to change what they do and how they teach. Professional development requires approaches that show teachers how to implement rigorous standards, new curriculum, address the goals of performance assessments, and shift their pedagogy.

One Size Fits All Workshops

The first dilemma is the traditional professional development workshops, which generally involve participants who attend sessions at scheduled times and are led by leaders with special expertise with little follow up for implementation (Garet et al., 2001). Tournaki et al. (2011) references an analysis by Garet et al. in 2001. Both studies used data from the Teacher Activity Survey as a part of a national evaluation of the Eisenhower Professional Development Program. The findings from 312 districts and 1255 teachers showed that traditional professional development activities did not have a positive influence on coherence, active learning, nor change in teacher practice.

Reform Centered Professional Development

Traditional professional development is not the only type of professional development that leads to dilemmas of ineffectiveness. Professional development centered on reform can also lead to dilemmas because school leaders are pressured to gain quick results and immediate

improvements (Guskey, T., 2009). In the absence of thoughtful planning and well-implemented professional development, reform efforts will never be a success (Guskey and Yoon, 2009). In order to position themselves for any transition, educational leaders must support their teachers and promote student learning through effective professional development (Marrongelle, et al., 2013). Bringing effective professional development to the forefront of all reform allows teachers to lead the change in their classrooms and work together to ensure that all students are achieving and learning at high levels (Marrongelle et al., 2013).

Lack of Teacher Buy-In

Another dilemma is teachers' commitment to change their instructional practice because teachers need to know that what they are learning works but more importantly is not just a passing fad (Jacobs, J., Koellner, K., & Funderburk, J., 2012). The top down approach has to diminish if we are going to get teachers to buy into Common Core. If we want teachers to shift the way they teach then leaders have to change their beliefs about implementation (Posnick-Goodwin, S., 2014). According to California Teachers Association (CTA) only 46% of teachers say they have been involved in the implementation process at their schools and there is a huge disconnect in what teachers need (Gulamhussein, A., 2013).

A three-year study done by Jacobs et al. (2012) in the Cherry Creek School District in Centennial, Colorado, introduced a problem solving cycle of professional development to 11 middle schools within the district. The first year, only four schools participated, six schools participated the second year, and all 11 schools were participating by the last year. As the teachers' content knowledge and collaboration improved, the professional development model gained momentum and sustainability. The cycle proved to have positive results because time and collaboration were necessary characteristics of the change the district was seeking.

Effective Professional Development

Throughout my literature review, duration, form, and collaborative participation surfaced as the most important characteristics of effective professional development. Desimone et al., (2002) conducted a three year national study of 1,027 teachers from 93% of districts in the country, six case studies, and ten in depth case studies in five states of teachers who participated in professional development as sponsored by the federal government's Eisenhower Professional Development Program. The researchers found the aforementioned characteristics as the top three in terms of effective professional development.

Poekert's (2012) study called Ready Schools Miami (RSM) included 255 elementary schools in the Miami Dade County Public School District took a professional development approach to school reform. The study attempted to address the gap in research that exists between reform and implementation. He found that when teachers participated in professional development, teacher practice improved and to improve teacher quality and instruction, a successful reform effort must utilize effective professional development that supports teachers' ability to provide rigorous instruction (Poekert, 2012).

According to a survey of teachers polled by CTA, many teachers said they had not been given adequate training or time to plan high quality lessons that address the CCSS. Teachers also felt that their classrooms lacked proper equipment, technology, and resources to make the shifts that Common Core is requiring (Menzel, C., 2014). Teachers need time to collaborate, try new lessons, and attend several workshops until they feel comfortable (Posnick-Goodwin, S., 2014). Teachers indicated that they need time to plan, practice good lessons, observe and collaborate with peers, in order to transition successfully to Common Core.

Action Research and Theoretical Frameworks

Action researchers define the action research several different ways; however, one thing they all have in common is that action research involves taking action to solve a problem and improve practice. The action is centered on communication, reflection, and evaluation. The process of change is ongoing and as outlined by Coghlan and Brannick (2014) consists of four steps: constructing, planning action, taking action, and evaluating action.

There are four theoretical frameworks that relate to professional development and effectiveness. The four frameworks, as represented in Figure 2.1, are pedagogical content knowledge, adult learning theory, collaboration, and reflective practice. The theoretical frameworks model created a common focus for the action research and an in depth professional development model, which centered on teacher change and efficacy (Garet, et al., 2013; Steyn, G.M., 2005).

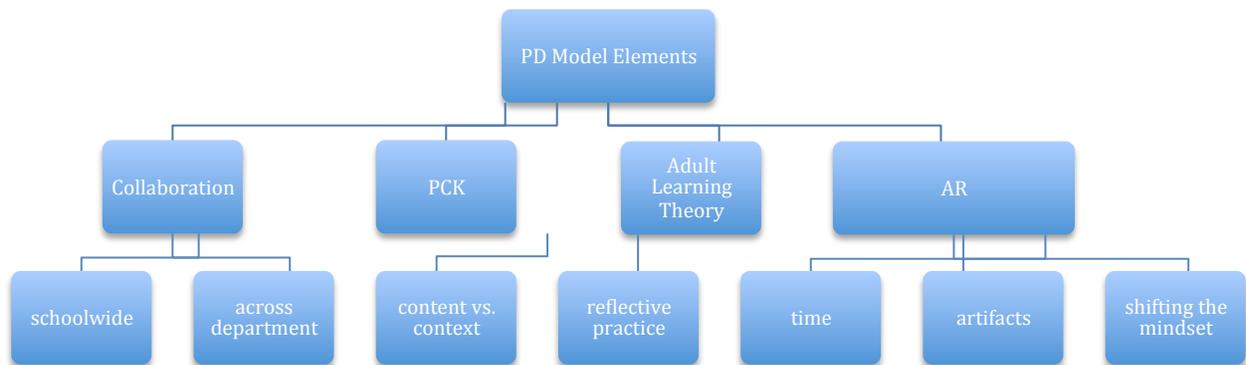


Figure 2.1 Professional Development Model Elements

Pedagogical Content Knowledge

Professional development allows teachers to reflect on and change their existing knowledge and beliefs about their instructional practice (Michael Putman, et al., 2009). When teachers

strengthen their content knowledge and pedagogical practices, teacher quality improves (Dash, S., de Kramer, R.M., O'Dwyer, L.M., Masters, J., & Russell, M., 2012). A math teacher in the Fresno school district in California gives an example of how she performed a model lesson on volume and used the language arts standards to enforce academic language in math, teach listening and speaking skills to the students in order to collaborate and use the math practice standards to explain their answers (Posnick-Goodwin, S., 2014).

A teacher quality study was done by Dash, et al. (2012) where 79 fifth grade math teachers (34 experimental teachers and 45 control teachers) participated in an online professional development model with over 70 hours of training. The findings show that the students whose teachers had received professional development in higher order thinking skills outperformed their peers on mathematics assessments by more than a full grade level when compared to the teachers who did not engage in professional development. The quantitative study by Dash et al. (2012) used repeated measures of analysis of variance to show that the experimental group of teachers had significant gains in pedagogical content knowledge and pedagogical practices when compared to the control group; thus improving the quality of instruction and delivery.

Adult learning theory

Changes in quality of instruction and delivery occur when teachers change their attitudes about teaching (Chen & McCray, 2012). Teacher quality deals with teachers as learners and how through professional development, they can improve their instructional practices. A study done by Chen et al., (2012) demonstrates how attitudes affect practice and knowledge. The Chen et al. study called the Early Mathematics Education program (EME) project surveyed approximately 340 pre-kindergarten teachers to show the urgent need for professional development in early grades for mathematics. Chen et al., (2012) noted that after a complete school year, each student

whose teacher participated in the professional development program gained an additional three months of mathematical learning and students who were even further behind the national norms gained an additional five month of learning. When teachers were asked to identify their most effective source of teaching support, 91% said professional development. The Chen et al. (2012) study and the Dash, et al. (2012) study support the research findings that when teachers participate in effective professional development, they will likely increase their own knowledge, skills, and improve their teaching practice; thus in turn, will positively affect student achievement.

In California, teachers are finding their ground with Common Core. One teacher in Fresno felt that he was swimming in a big ocean with no raft or life jacket as he tried to make the shift to Common Core based lessons and curriculum (Posnick-Goodwin, S., 2014). Teachers at one elementary school appreciated having Common Core coaches visit her class and do model lessons. It made them feel supported.

Collaboration

Collaborative participation was the third most effective characteristic noted in the literature. Collaboration contributes toward the development of a positive school culture that is committed to change and creation of a better learning environment for all students (Robinson, R. and Carrington, S., 2002). Effective professional development should provide teachers with the opportunity to discuss achievements, address problems in delivering new strategies, and provide feedback through collaboration with other teachers (Steyn, G.M., 2005).

Collaboration can be both positive and negative in terms of effective professional development because it can build a sense of community and shared purpose among teachers but collaboration can also create conflict when teachers' beliefs and practices contradict with one

another (Guskey, T., 2009). Effective professional development for teachers is collaborative because it emphasizes both active and interactive learning experiences, often through participation in learning communities (Hunzicker, J., 2010).

A collaborative professional development model was supported through a case study done by Poekert (2012), which was mentioned earlier in the synthesis. As part of the Ready Schools Miami (RSM) reform initiative professional learning communities were developed in order to improve the quality of education, align curriculum and instruction, and focus on closing the achievement gap. The case study analyzed the implementation and impact of the RSM initiative through the participation of 12 teachers from two schools. The teachers were observed and 11 dimensions of teaching practice, which were grouped in four domains, were recorded. Qualitative interviews and participant observations were also conducted. The results concluded that collaborative professional development not only improved teacher practice but teachers also formed professional learning communities that fostered professional growth and improved practice through site based inquiry. Poekert (2012) points out that teachers value professional learning communities because they guide their own professional growth by learning from and with one another because they are moving towards common goals such as planning, instruction, analyzing student work, and site based inquiry.

Reflective practice

Common Core recognizes teachers are the experts of critical thinking and teaching skills our students need to know, but districts have done little to allow time for teacher reflection. When teachers participate in action research and start by goal setting then they become a more reflective practitioner (Poekert, P., 2012). Common Core offers new opportunity for teachers to be creative in the classroom and reflective about the implementation process. The reflection

process is ultimately what will bring about change during this time of reform because reflection will likely be based on their experiences and cause change in their instructional practice (Jenkins, S. & Agamba, J., 2013).

Teachers are learning that as they implement the lessons and collaborate with other teachers; some lessons go well and some do not. The benefits of reflection is that as teachers teach the new standards, the feeling of being overwhelmed with the new freedom of how to teach is diminished and teachers are learning ways to get literacy and problem solving in all content areas (Posnick-Goodwin, S., 2014).

Summary

Common Core implementation requires collaboration on the part of all stakeholders so that we as educators can finally do what is in the best interest of teachers, students, and public education (Posnick-Goodwin, S., 2014). Change is never easy but change is consistent and you can bet that it will happen especially in education. What our students are being asked to learn in order to prepare them for a globally competitive society is critical thinking, persuasive speaking, and argumentative writing in all areas. Our teachers are being asked to teach a new way (Posnick-Goodwin, S., 2014). This new way of teaching is liberating for teachers and powerful for students. The new standards validate what effective teaching has looked like for years before Common Core was adopted (CTA/Gulamhussein, A., 2013). The support for Common Core has to be universal and teachers have to be a part of the process.

In order for Common Core to be successful for students and teachers, and begin to address the achievement gap, schools must build a conceptual framework and define the role and meaning of equity within the Common Core (Kornhaber, et al., 2014). Currently there is no direction on how to meet these goals (Wallender, J., 2014) and that is because teachers must pick

curriculum and use instructional methods best suited to their students (Conley, D.T., 2014). Educators must build on their current effective methods to implement the CCSS in ways that make most sense for the students in their classroom.

As a nation, we have to eliminate inequities in implementation, which include varying levels of implementation of CCSS across states (Liebtag, E., 2013). The three levels of implementation that can be seen are: business as usual, use of low cost or free online curricular resources, and a mix of both. As a nation we must decide upon a moral framework and funding should not be equal but based on needs.

Other implications for Common Core implementation and addressing the achievement gap are to define the role teachers' play in student success. Collaboration across K through 12 systems and institutions of higher education, state agencies, and community colleges is necessary to prepare teachers to focus on college and career transitions (Marrongelle, et al., 2013).

Education reform and professional development of educators cannot exist in isolation. The implications address the need for effective professional development in K-16 and the need for focused and sustainable professional development in order to successfully implement education reform.

In planning effective professional developments, educators needs to first ask the question of whether or not the approaches they are using are supported by research which have led to improved teacher quality and student achievement (Guskey & Yoon, 2009). Guskey and Yoon (2009) point out that over 1300 studies address the effect of professional development on learning outcomes. Planning effective professional development with regards to past research and case studies will make the results of future professional development meaningful and credible.

All of the studies reviewed the importance of professional development as it pertains to student achievement and teacher effectiveness. The next step for research is to take a closer look at the culture of schools and the learning process that needs to improve. Schools need to be given resources that allow struggling students to succeed and teachers need to be consistently trained on how to improve classroom instruction (Kanold, T. and Ebert, J., 2010). As teachers become more confident in their practice, they will be more willing to work together, have reflective conversations, and reach sustainability of professional development topics and strategies long after the professional development is over.

The ultimate goal of professional development as it pertains to the studies mentioned in this paper is to create an effective and sustainable model for teacher improvement of pedagogical knowledge and instructional practices while improving student achievement (Dash, et al., 2012). Implementation of any successful professional development model does not come without problems; however, the renewed focus on learning that occurs when the teachers are facilitating their own learning and have reflective conversations about their teaching and learning is priceless (Jacobs et al., 2012).

The power of professional development relies on the relationships that are built between pre-kindergarten through higher education institutions. When partnerships are developed, resources can be shared, conversations occur about improvement in education, and the continuous cycle of learning can take place for teachers and students. Education reform via professional development is not a quick fix nor is it something that is easy to learn, especially for low performing schools and ill prepared teachers (Prusaczyk, J., & Baker, P.J., 2011). Goals must be set that fit the needs of individual schools, teachers, and students when it comes to professional development. The success of students is primarily based on what teachers know.

The correlation between the teacher and student comes when both shift their attitude for teaching and learning, increase their pedagogical content knowledge, and develop practices that will make them effective teachers and learners. The achievement gap will begin to narrow if we provide teachers with the necessary tools via professional development that can be sustained beyond the professional development session (Rubel , L.H., & Chu, H., 2011; Poekert, P.E., 2012).

There must be changes in classroom instruction and higher performance expectations. States overall have to make changes in two areas: 1.) Curriculum and instruction – educators need to become familiar with the new standards, purchase new or adapt existing instructional materials, develop new curricula, and train teachers; 2.) Technology- districts must ensure that school buildings have the necessary internet capabilities and hardware to administer the computerized adaptive tests associated with Common Core (Warren, P. and Murphy, P., 2014). We can learn from the hasty implementation of Common Core in Kentucky and New York. Although they have seen lower levels of student proficiency on the new test, the test can be used as a tool to create long-term incentives to develop curricula and teaching methods that promote deeper learning sought by CCSS.

Professional development for Common Core should be intensive, ongoing, and connected to practice; focus on student learning and address the teaching of specific content; align with school improvement priorities and goals; and, build strong working relationships among teachers that focus on practices that are directly connected to the work that teachers do in their classrooms (Marrongelle, et al., 2013). Common Core training across the nation must integrate equity in teacher training sessions. Teacher training cannot be centralized in terms of access because that would be counterproductive to equity and the intentions of Common Core as it relates to the achievement gap (Liegtag, E., 2013). Educators must identify what strategies can create

equitable schools to strengthen implementation plans in all schools. There is no systematic way to improve teaching and learning; however, how we train the teachers for Common Core is a major factor in educational equity.

The bottom line is Common Core implementation must continue well past 2014-15 where teachers are implementing new standards for the first time; being trained; and testing students on material they themselves are not comfortable teaching (Warren, P. and Murphy, P., 2014). The process necessary to implement Common Core is more important than the achievement of long lasting success. This investment provides a consistent structure that goes beyond any latest fad in instruction.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

As of Fall 2014, 43 states have adopted the Common Core State Standards, which requires a shift in student expectations and teacher practice (Marrongelle, et al., 2013).

Nationwide teachers are facing a problem of trying to implement Common Core State Standards without proper training. Recent research has shown that teachers do not feel adequately prepared for Common Core implementation despite being informed about these new standards.

Ineffective professional development for teachers has plagued reform for decades; however, in the context of this action research, the new Common Core State Standards are different from any past reform in that teachers are being asked to teach skills and strategies that they, themselves, have never learned.

My project addresses this issue through the implementation of a professional development cycle whose foci are reading, writing, and discussion across all content areas, teacher and student reflections, teacher led professional development, lesson studies, and using the data and artifacts at the end of each cycle to refine teacher pedagogy. The goal of this project was to change teacher practice as evidenced by instructional strategies that teach students reading, writing, and discussion techniques in all content areas.

Lack of teacher preparedness and poor implementation of Common Core reform can be addressed through four theoretical frameworks: pedagogical content knowledge theory, adult learning theory, collaboration, and reflective practice theory. These four frameworks encompass an overarching transformational framework (Creswell, J., 2013) that help to explain why teachers face difficulty and frustration in implementing new standards, curricula, and pedagogy in their classroom without having the proper understanding of the aforementioned. These

theories also add significance for educators because they are based on action research, which allows for change, collaboration, and inquiry.

Research Questions

The following four research questions guided my study:

1. What are the experiences of teachers as they participated in action research to design a professional development model?
2. What are the experiences of ILT members as they participated in action research to design a professional development model?
3. In the perceptions of teachers and ILT members, what are the necessary components of an effective professional development model?
4. According to teachers, how did the professional development model design by action research influence their teaching?
 - 4.1 How did it influence teaching by guiding reflective practice as part of transformative learning?
 - 4.2 How did it influence teaching by encouraging teacher collaboration?
 - 4.3 How did it influence teaching by changing teacher perceptions about teaching reading, writing, and discussion in their content area?
 - 4.4 How did it influence changes in their teaching practice?

Research Design

The study used an action research design that used multiple research methods to address the problem of under-prepared teachers who are charged with teaching reading, writing, and discussion strategies in their content classes as they implement Common Core. The Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), comprised of the Principal, three Assistant Principals, one Instructional

Coach, one Targeted Student Population Coordinator, one Intervention Coordinator, one Testing Coordinator and seven department chairs, developed a professional development model that trains teachers in the Sixth Grade core, math, science, English, history, electives, physical education, and special education on how to teach reading, writing, and discussion in all content areas and change their pedagogy to meet the demands of the Common Core State Standards.

The action research design using multiple research methods was the best method because it analyzed both quantitative and qualitative measures in a single study. This allowed for the triangulation of multiple data sources in order for the results from one method to inform the results of another method (Creswell, J., 2003) and based on the current research done surrounding Common Core implementation, no professional development models have been mentioned to combine the four theoretical frameworks.

The action research study examined two aspects: the process and the outcome. The reason for the action research was because it was beneficial to the participants of the study and the school as a whole. Specifically, the process aspect of the action research allowed the teachers to be reflective about their teaching experience and grow as professionals by utilizing adult learning theory and feedback. The outcome aspect allowed the teachers to see that there was benefit in the professional development model in which they have taken part and the impact of the model on instruction and student learning. Since there are five data collection methods, a multiple methods study best met the needs of the study.

The qualitative methods attempted to answer the research questions by assessing the post-professional development surveys, the ILT observations feedback forms, the teacher post cycle reflections, the focus groups and interviews. Through the use of focus groups and interviews, I hoped to show changes in teacher perceptions and instructional pedagogy over time with respect

to the professional development model. The qualitative data was used to identify possible trends in order to establish a connection between the four theoretical frameworks, implementation, and practice.

The quantitative methods attempted to answer the research questions by assessing the pre-professional development survey and the post-professional development survey and the professional development evaluations. Based on the action research design, the quantitative design helped to assess how the action research process changed teachers' perceptions and pedagogy in the classroom. The surveys quantified the answers to the research questions in an attempt to generalize the study to the entire population of teachers within the local district or district as a whole.

Site Description

The research was conducted at a middle school within a large urban school district located in Southern California. It is located in a city that is considered one of the top 20 most diverse in the nation. The middle school includes grades six through eight with a population of 1450 students. The student racial/ethnic distribution at the school are 64% Latino, 26% Black, 6% Asian, 1% Pacific Islander and 2% White. The school has a School for Advance Studies (SAS)³, a Math/Science Magnet program, an AVID (Advancement via Individual Determination) program, and a largely diverse special education population. The API⁴ of the school is 724

³ SAS is a specialized program for students who have been identified gifted by the district in which they take honors or accelerated courses that are taught by SAS trained teachers to differentiate the core curriculum to meet the needs of all students. AVID is a sixth through twelfth grade system to prepare students in the academic middle for four-year college eligibility and success. It has a proven record in bringing out the best in students and closing the achievement gap. The goal of AVID is to provide students with high expectations, encouragement, day-to-day help through the AVID elective class, and a vision of college as an attainable goal.

⁴ Academic Performance Index used by the state to measure a schools academic performance and growth based a variety of academic measures. Numeric API score ranges from a low of 200 to a high of 1000. The interim statewide API performance target for all schools is 800. A school's growth is measured by how well it is moving toward or past that goal. An API score is calculated for all students in a school as well as numerous API scores for each subgroup at the school (such as by race, English Learner Status, students with disabilities, and socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils)

(based on the 2012-2013 school year), with only 40.3% of the students scoring proficient and/or advanced in English and 34.9% scoring proficient and/or advanced in mathematics on the state standardized exams; 64.4% of students attended school 96% of the time; and 65% of the students qualify for free and reduced lunch. Over the past five years, there has been very little growth in student proficiency in English Language Arts and mathematics, leaving the school stagnant in terms of academic progress and teacher growth.

Sample Selection

The participants in the study consisted of 56 classroom teachers at the school, seven out of classroom coordinators, three counselors, and four administrators. All teachers, who teach grades six to eight in science, English, math, history, electives, physical education, and special education, were asked to take part in the project via email (Appendix G); therefore, all content areas as represented by the ILT were represented in the study. All teachers at the school site are required by the district and the school site to attend the weekly professional development sessions, which are structured in whole group setting and departmental setting. Staff members who were interested in participating in a focus group and/or interview expressed their interest on the consent form that was given to them at the start of the study (Appendix H). My goal was to have a minimum of ten interviews and focus groups conducted. I conducted a total of thirteen focus groups and interviews with teachers, department chairs, instructional coaches, and administrators. The participants were each offered a \$10 gift card.

I chose this population because all content teachers are responsible for teaching reading, writing, and discussion techniques to all students through the core subjects in order to meet the requirements of the Common Core State Standards and I chose an urban school district because I

wanted to see how teachers at less affluent schools are implementing Common Core as the nation moves to close the achievement gap in student learning. Because all schools in California are undergoing a process for implementing Common Core and most districts/schools are adopting professional development models to change their teachers' pedagogy, I felt that it would be beneficial to perform the action research at a site where the school goals align with the goals of the study which is to create systems that will sustain the instructional program of the school regardless of administrative leadership. The goal of the action research project was to structure the professional development model to meet the specific needs of teachers at the site and based on the teachers' feedback during the implementation process, the professional development model would allow change in teacher pedagogy, teacher effectiveness, and student achievement.

The action research project involved teacher collaboration, reflection, adult learning, and professional development, which I anticipated would benefit many teachers on the campus. The teachers included in the study varied in terms of their teaching experience from one to over twenty years. There were two main constituencies involved in the action research project: all teachers who participated in the professional development and those who will be interested in seeing the results such as administrators, Instructional Leadership Team members, and possibly, the local district director and local superintendent.

Data Collection Methods

This study sought to understand process and outcome; therefore, qualitative and quantitative methods were utilized to collect data. There were five data collection methods (Table 3.1). Three of the methods were used with all teachers and two of the methods were used with selected teachers. The pre- and post-professional development survey, post-professional

development reflections, and post cycle reflections were used with all teachers to show change in teacher practice and teacher attitude as the professional development cycle progressed. The focus groups and interviews were used with randomly selected teachers, two per department, and all ILT members to discuss which elements of the professional development model were essential to changing teacher pedagogy and attitude about Common Core and reading, writing, and discussion in each content area. The action research project, developed by the researcher, was comprised of (four) five week cycles where the previous cycle built upon the next cycle and guided the professional development as the school implemented reading, writing, and discussion across all content areas. Each department was responsible for the implementation of the instructional strategies and measuring progress of the students through weekly formative assessments and a culminating unit project at the end of each cycle. The following outlines the cycle process of the action research project.

Table 3.1

Data Collection Methods

Data Collection Instruments	Respondents
Pre- and post- professional development survey	All teachers
Post PD evaluations	All teachers
Post cycle reflections	All teachers
Focus Groups	Selected teachers and ILT
Teacher interviews	Selected teachers and ILT

Action Research Cycle. The researcher developed a structured model that had been piloted at two previous school sites. The professional development model was presented to and adopted by the research site for implementation of Common Core instructional strategies using the action research process. The members of the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) chose three instructional strategies that aligned with Common Core implementation and addressed

reading, writing, and discussion techniques (Appendix A). The ILT developed an observation template for each content specific department and department meeting discussion template so that each data collection method, within a cycle, was common among grade levels and content area. Prior to the roll out of the first cycle with the staff, the ILT met to discuss staff expectations, set norms for observations that took place throughout the cycles, and the timeline for each cycle. The department chairs also met with various members of the ILT in order to ensure that there are no questions or concerns regarding the rollout of the first cycle. The instructional coaches, department chairs, and content assigned administrator met once a week in order to provide feedback on the implementation of the professional development model.

Over the course of the four cycles, the teachers attended four whole group professional development sessions to learn and reinforce the instructional strategies (Table 3.2), observed the strategies in action by their colleagues and provided feedback on the implementation of the strategies within each cycle via surveys, reflections, and conversations with the researcher. Table 3.2 provides an overview of the topics addressed during each professional development meeting. The four topics that were addressed during professional development align with the following four theoretical frameworks and stood out as major themes in the findings: pedagogical content knowledge, adult learning theory, collaboration, and reflective practice.

Table 3.2

Action Research PD Model

Date	Meeting Type	Topic
August 18	Department Meeting	
*August 25	PD School Wide / By Department	Cycle 1 Intro-Student Collaboration and Discussion School-wide focus
September 1	Department Meeting	Cycle 1 Grade level content (GLC) Calendar Common Assessment Implementation and Rubric
*September 8	Department Meeting	Lesson delivery /Observation
September 15	PD School Wide/ By Department	Cycle 1 Artifact discussion & Reflection (GLC)
Date	Meeting Type	Topic
*September 22	PD School Wide / By Department	Cycle 2 Intro-Reading Strategies School-wide focus
September 29	Department Meeting	Cycle 2 Department Analysis of data / School-wide focus
*October 6	PD School Wide / By Department	Cycle 2 Grade level content (GLC) Calendar Common Assessment Implementation and Rubric
October 13	Department Meeting	Lesson delivery /Observation
*October 20	PD School Wide/ By Department	Cycle 2 Artifact discussion & Reflection (GLC)
Date	Meeting Type	Topic
October 27	Department Meeting	Cycle 3 Intro- Low Stakes, High Stakes Writing/School wide focus
* November 3	PD School Wide / By Department	Cycle 3 Grade level content (GLC) Calendar Common Assessment Implementation and Rubric
November 10	Department Meeting	Lesson delivery /Observation
November 17	Department Meeting	Cycle 3 Artifact discussion & Reflection (GLC)
November 24	No School	Thanksgiving Holiday
Date	Meeting Type	Topic
December 1	PD School Wide / By Department	Cycle 4 Intro Department Data Analysis/School-wide analysis
December 8	Department Meeting	Lesson delivery /Observation
* December 15	PD School Wide / By Department	Cycle 4 Grade level content (GLC) Calendar Common Assessment Implementation and Rubric
January 12	PD School Wide / By Department	Cycle 4 Grade level content (GLC) Calendar Common Assessment Implementation and Rubric
January 19	Department Meeting	Cycle 4 Artifact discussion & Reflection (GLC)

Surveys. The pre- and post- professional development survey (Appendix B) was constructed by the researcher to include five questions that addressed demographic information and ten Likert-like questions that addressed the professional development model. The survey Google link was emailed to all staff to complete in August as well as December. The focus of the pre professional development survey was to act as a baseline for perceptions and knowledge and also to gain a better understanding of the perceived instructional needs of the teachers with regards to training, collaboration, and implementation of the Common Core instructional strategies. The results from the survey assisted the ILT in presenting professional development activities that incorporated the instructional strategies and also met the learning needs of the teachers. The post survey was also administered at the end of the last cycle to assess the change in perception and knowledge of the teachers with regards to training, collaboration, and implementation of the Common Core instructional strategies.

Post-Professional Development Evaluations. In addition, electronic evaluations (Appendix E) were completed after each whole group monthly professional development within the professional development cycle process. The teachers were emailed the Google link to the evaluation at the conclusion of each whole group professional development session. All teachers are required by the district to attend the professional development sessions at their school site. Professional development sessions take place on each Tuesday of the week over a 20-week period of time during the teachers' contractual time. The post-professional development evaluations consisted of ten Likert-like questions and two open response questions. The evaluations were used to inform the ILT how the professional development met the instructional needs of the teachers and how and when they plan to implement the presented strategies in their classrooms.

Observations. The observations performed by ILT members were specific to the instructional strategies and instructional goals of the school. The observations are not a part of the data collection methods but for the purposes of this study are worth mentioning, as they were a part of the focus group and interview discussions. Administrators, coordinators, and teachers conducted each observation in pairs. Each team was responsible for two content areas, Science and Math or English and history. The teams observed each teacher within their department at least once within a cycle. The observations were recorded on an observation template that was developed by the ILT. The observations were used to facilitate conversations among ILT members regarding implementation of the strategies, gain actionable feedback from the professional developments, and also to guide reflective conversations with the department chairs and teachers following the observations. The instructional coaches provided feedback to the administrators as well as the department chairs. The instructional coaches also performed demonstration lessons for teachers in their classes.

Post Cycle Reflections. Once the first cycle began, the teachers met once a week either in grade level meetings, department meetings, magnet meetings, or for professional development meetings. The teachers provided weekly formative assessments to students that were common among grade level and content areas. The teachers met to analyze their data to guide next steps in terms of instruction and adjust their implementation, as necessary. Each cycle lasted five weeks with the last week dedicated to a unit-culminating project or assessment. The goal was to have the teachers complete the one reflection at the end of each cycle; however due to external factors, the post cycle reflections were completed at the end of cycle one and cycle three. Teachers completed the post cycle reflections (Appendix F) in order to reflect on instructional practice. The reflections consisted of two questions that addressed demographic information, seven

Likert-like questions, and three open response questions. The reflections were brought to department meetings to guide conversations about the professional development cycle and for the department chairs to bring feedback to the ILT meetings. The ILT used data from the previous cycle to guide the professional development topics, reflective conversations, and weekly department meetings.

Focus Groups. Teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators who were willing to participate met in focus groups to discuss the cycle process, which included the professional development sessions, demo lessons, observations, and reflections. The focus groups were also conducted with the ILT members. The researcher developed the focus group protocols for teachers and administrators (Appendix C and D), which consisted of ten in-depth questions about the action research process and the professional development model. The researcher also conducted the focus groups meetings. The goal of the focus groups was to access more informative data regarding the professional development cycle, changes in pedagogy, and teacher attitudes about literacy across all content areas. All focus group sessions were recorded and later transcribed.

Interviews. The researcher conducted the in-person interviews with department chairs, instructional coaches, administrators, and teachers who volunteered. The interview protocol (Appendix C and D) was developed by the researcher and consisted of ten questions. The goal of the interview was to gain a positive and negative perspective on the professional development cycle, Common Core implementation, and pre and post perspectives. All interview participants received a gift card for their participation and reassured that their responses during the interview were confidential. All interviews were recorded and later transcribed.

Post Cycle Adjustments. At the end of each cycle, the data collected was used to inform the ILT about the implementation process as it pertained to Common Core through sustained and continuous professional development. Teachers provided evidence of student work and assessments to continue to plan and adjust planning within each cycle. This information will be used to inform planning as the school moves into the 2016-2017 school year and continues Common Core implementation.

Data Analysis Methods

All of the data that was collected was analyzed by frequency in terms of responses and the responses were categorized based on the four research questions of the action research project. I looked for specific themes and subthemes that arose during the focus groups and interviews; as well as, the open response questions from the professional development evaluations and post-cycle reflections. I also used the quantitative data from the five data collection methods to triangulate the findings in order to observe possible trends and changes.

Surveys. To determine the change in perception and experiences surrounding effective professional development, I conducted an independent t test using StatPlus. The independent t test was performed for the pre and the post survey because there were two different sample sizes that participated in the surveys and I cannot ensure that all the participants from the pre survey are the same participants that completed the post survey. I calculated the overall mean of the pre survey and the overall mean of the post survey to determine if there was a significant difference in the results. I also organized the data around the mean of each question (the scale is coded 1 to 5 with 5 correlated to strongly agree and 1 correlating to strongly disagree) for the pre and the post survey. I used the mean of each item for the pre and the post surveys to determine the significance among the means using an alpha of 0.05. The pre professional development survey,

taken by a variety of teachers on the staff, was used by the ILT to guide the upcoming professional development planning for the implementation of the strategies and used to see what skills the teachers possess that might aid in their facilitation of the learning process.

Post-Professional Development Evaluations. A statistical analysis was done using the data from the post-professional development evaluations to provide feedback on the quality and effectiveness of the professional development and to guide the ILT on how to move forward with the implementation.

The post-professional development evaluations were analyzed by conducting a descriptive statistical analysis to show the patterns of each professional development session over time. I calculated the overall mean of each post-professional development evaluation to determine if there was a difference in the results. I also organized the data around the mean of each question (the scale is coded 1 to 5 with 5 correlated to strongly agree and 1 correlating to strongly disagree). I used the mean of each item for the evaluations to determine a pattern among the means.

The open ended responses were categorized into the main themes that emerged as determined by the research questions.

Post Cycle Reflections. The post cycle reflections completed by the teachers were used to provide data on teacher knowledge, pedagogy, and comfort of instructional strategies at the end of the unit. The reflections were analyzed by categorizing the questions and answers based on the research questions. The data was used to guide the focus group questions, teacher practice, ILT support of the teachers, and further implementation needs. The teacher reflections completed post cycle were also used to demonstrate student understanding of the objectives, mastery of the content, and check for understanding to guide teachers' future instruction. The

Likert-like questions and open-ended questions were analyzed by categorizing the answers into the themes that emerged as determined by the research questions.

Focus Groups and Interviews. Focus group meetings and interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher to maintain accuracy of the data. The focus groups and interview responses were analyzed to determine which components of the professional development model that teachers felt were helpful in their classrooms. Also, through the focus groups responses, I looked for patterns in teacher satisfaction of the implementation approach. The goal of the interviews was to provide additional insight from teachers and ILT members on the process of changing teacher pedagogy, implementing Common Core specific strategies in content areas, and what process of the cycle were perceived to be most helpful and what was lacking. After identifying several themes that emerged from the focus group and interviews, I aligned those themes with the research questions in order to ensure that all research questions had been addressed with regards to the study.

Access

I am a middle school principal in the same district. A colleague school principal allowed me to conduct research at her school to assist the staff with the implementation of Common Core Standards. I met with the ILT, teachers by departments and with the whole group to explain how the research benefitted them as a whole, individually, and as a department. My goal was to show them how the success of Common Core implementation is about access to resources and that with a clear vision, everyone benefits.

Role Management and Ethical Issues

As the researcher at the study site, I was responsible primarily for the data collection and facilitation of the professional development model. Since I am a principal at another site in the

same school district, it was important for me to establish myself as the researcher and ensure the participants that I had no supervisory responsibility at the research site. The Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), comprised of department chairs, lead teachers, coordinators, and instructional coaches, was led by the research site Principal as they implemented the action research project. I worked with the ILT to develop pre- and post-professional development surveys, unit templates in all content areas, formative assessments, and culminating projects. This project along with the implementation of Common Core provided the study site with the opportunity to use professional development, ILT meetings and planning, data in order to guide instruction, improve teacher quality, and improve student achievement. My goal as the researcher was for the entire staff to become active participants in the Common Core implementation process. The focus of the study was on transforming teaching and learning, and improving relationships among teachers and administrators so that there was a collective effort to improve instruction and student achievement.

In order to decrease or eliminate any ethical issues, I was clear about my role as a graduate student who was conducting research for the purposes of the study. I provided all participants with information about their rights regarding participating in the study and in accordance with the LAUSD and UCLA Institutional Review Board. The anonymity of the data collected ensured that there was no potential risk to participants based on the proposed action research study and that the job performance of the participants would not be evaluated based on their responses. There was no need to label the data collection pieces with unique identifiers, nor did I need to identify who completed the surveys. There was an informed consent (Appendix H) given to participants to inform him or her that their participation in the study was completely optional and they could choose not to participate at any time. Also, since my goal was to be

minimally disruptive, I assured participants that the data collected during the study was anonymous and would not be used as an evaluative measure. All data collected from surveys, reflections, interviews, focus groups, and observations were securely stored and password protected on a digital file. All data collection belongs to the researcher and would not be given to any district personnel for their use or benefit.

Ensuring Credibility

To ensure credibility, first I addressed all personal biases. I did this by performing member checks by providing transcripts of all interviews from the focus group and interviews to participants for review. This not only clarified what participants said during the process but also ensured that what was transcribed was not misconstrued or misinterpreted with my own biases.

I also addressed the reactivity that I may experience based on my position as a researcher and a district employee. I was clear about my role as a researcher and not as a participant. My role was to collect and analyze the data from their pre and post surveys, professional development evaluations, post cycle reflections, focus group responses and interviews. I also triangulated the data so that I could gain multiple sources of data to look for trends or disparities.

Finally, I must acknowledge the insufficient sample size as it relates to generalizability. Since I was working with one school within the large urban district, I cannot transfer my findings to smaller districts, districts in rural or affluent areas, and districts outside of Southern California because districts throughout California and across the nation have different means for implementation of Common Core. Also, because of time constraints and resources, I worked with a limited sample size. However, purposeful sampling helped me to understand the characteristics of the population based on my sample in order to generalize from the sample to the population.

Reliability and Validity

The last issue is validity of self reported data because my study deals with primarily the perceptions and attitudes of the ILT and teachers. The team and the teachers self reported on Common Core comfort level, observations, and reflected on changes in pedagogy and attitude. Because I attempted to gain most of the information through focus groups and interviews, I used interview questions that had been vetted by the California Department of Education in order to ensure credibility. I also worked with the administrator over professional development to ensure that all observations were uniform so that data collection was the same across ILT members. This not only increased inner rater reliability but it assured that all observers were trained to look for the same elements that answered the research questions.

Summary

The benefit of the study is that the professional development cycle will become common practice at the school site in order to create a sustainable model regardless of leadership changes. All teachers are required by the district to attend professional development and department meetings. It is my hope that the school will adopt the professional development model for the 2016-2017 school year as a common practice to implement Common Core and improve instruction. Therefore, the collection of data surrounding the process will provide insight and feedback to the staff about the work they have done in the 2015-2016 school year and potentially in the future. The goal of the ILT is to provide teachers with a quality professional development model that teachers will internalize in order to allow their perceptions to drive teacher pedagogy.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This study investigated the perceptions and perspectives of teachers and administrators as they implemented a professional development model and took part in an action research project that was designed to address the needs of reform and Common Core at a school.

Common Core ushered in a whole new set of standards but it also requires a whole new way of teaching and learning including high stakes writing, text annotation, close reading, informative text, and quality student discussions. Teachers or students were not prepared for this type of shift in learning and a professional development model that allowed for collaboration, revision, and accountability needed to be implemented.

For a period of five months during the fall semester of the 2015-2016 school year, I monitored the action research of a public middle school, grades 6 through 8, in an urban school district in Southern California. The action research consisted of a professional development model, developed by the researcher, that consisted of four (5) week cycles where teachers and administrators facilitated a collaborative process in which teachers participated in whole group professional development on a particular strategy, the teachers implemented the strategy within their classroom, the teachers were observed using the strategy, and the teachers brought artifacts to the department meetings to discuss implementation of the strategy within their classroom.

The focus of my study was to document the experiences, perceptions, and influence, if any, of the professional development model in the form of action research. The action research was designed to address the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of teachers as they participated in action research to design a professional development model?

2. What are the experiences of ILT members as they participated in action research to design a professional development model?
3. In the perceptions of teachers and ILT members, what are the necessary components of an effective professional development model?
4. According to teachers, how did the professional development model design by action research influence their teaching?
 - 4.1 How did it influence teaching by guiding reflective practice as part of transformative learning?
 - 4.2 How did it influence teaching by encouraging teacher collaboration?
 - 4.3 How did it influence teaching by changing teacher perceptions about teaching reading, writing, and discussion in their content area?
 - 4.4 How did it influence changes in their teaching practice?

The findings from this chapter are based on my analysis of the following data: four professional development sessions (whole group) reflections, pre and post-professional development surveys, two post cycle reflections, focus groups and interviews with teachers and administrators regarding the professional development model.

Organization of Data Analysis

This chapter details the results of data analysis and reports findings in relation to the research questions for this study. Background information on the survey is presented first in the form of sample population and demographics, which is then followed by pre and post survey results and post-professional development evaluation feedback. The content of the interviews and focus groups with their related findings are then discussed as they relate to the four research questions. The findings are presented as follows:

- The Experiences of Teachers and Instructional Leadership Team Members as they participated in the professional development model
- The Perceptions of Teachers and Instructional Leadership Team members regarding the necessary components of an effective professional development model
- The Influence of the professional development model design by action research on teaching

The chapter ends with a summary of the findings.

Overview of Participants and Site Description

A total of 56 teachers participated in the monthly professional development sessions, which were mandated by the district and the school site. The teachers' range of classroom experience was one to over 25 years. The teachers that participated taught either all content areas including math, science, English, and history; physical education; special education; or electives such as computers, music, and art. There were seven instructional coaches and coordinators, three counselors, and four administrators who also took part in the action research. There were 18 individuals that participated in the interviews and focus groups. Pseudonyms are used for all participants who volunteered for the individual interviews and focus groups in order to protect the anonymity of all participants.

Summary of Survey Data

The professional development pre-survey consisted of fifteen questions and 32 teachers participated: grades six (14), grade seven (20), grade eight (12). The teachers completed the voluntary survey online on Google forms and the optional participation accounts for the variance in participation with regards to the pre and the post survey data. The teaching experience ranged from 50 percent of teachers having taught 15 years or less and the other 50 percent from 16 years

to over 25 years. All content areas were represented. The professional development post survey also consisted of fifteen questions and 43 teachers participated: grades six (24), grade seven (20), grade eight (20). The teachers completed the survey online on Google forms. The teaching experience ranged from 46 percent of teachers having taught 15 years or less and over 50 percent from 16 years to over 25 years. All content area teachers participated. Prior to the start of the first cycle, 30 out of the 32 teachers had read the common core standards related to their content area; however, according to the survey, as the end of the fourth cycle, 100% of teachers had read the common core standards related to their content area. Table 4.1 illustrates a comparison of the pre and post survey results using MS Excel 2011. According to the t test for independent samples, which was performed using StatsPlus mac Version v6, to determine the statistical significance of the means (pre: $M= 4.06$ and post: $M= 4.28$) of the related samples, there was no statistical significance among the pre and post-test results ($p=0.07765 >0.05$). An additional comparison was done to analyze the mean around each question in order to determine statistical significance among each response item. Only response item one, showed a statistical significance in the pre and post response ($p= 0.00834 <0.05$); therefore, the responses from the pre and post survey showed no overall significant difference in the responses. Item one asked the following question: “The professional development in which I have participated was relevant to my content”. Based on the statistical significance of the mean of question one from the pre and the post survey, the relevancy of the content of each whole group professional development can be attributed to the structured topics presented during each cycle and use of each instructional strategy within each department. The post professional development evaluations align with this finding because 87% of participants agreed and strongly agreed that professional development session one was relevant to their classroom needs; 76% agreed and strongly agreed following session two; 81%

agreed and strongly agreed following session three; and, 67% agreed and strongly agreed following session four. This was also noted by the feedback given during the focus groups and the interviews.

Table 4.1

Pre and Post Survey Comparison of the Means^a

<u>Item Response^b</u>	<u>Mean</u>	
	Pre- (n=32)	Post- (n=43)
The professional development in which I have participated was relevant to my content. ^{1,2}	4.1	4.5
The professional development in which I have participated helped me to implement CCSS in my classroom. ⁴	4.0	4.2
I feel whole group professional development is beneficial to learning new strategies and content. ³	3.7	4
I feel department specific professional development is beneficial to learning new strategies and content. ³	4.5	4.6
After a professional development, my department creates an action plan to implement the strategy. ⁴	4.1	4.2
After a professional development, I implement the strategy in my classroom. ⁴	4.1	4
I receive feedback from administrators and/or instructional coaches regarding my instructional practices based on observations. ^{1,2}	3.9	4.1
Department meetings that I attend are collaborative and beneficial to professional growth. ³	4.1	4.3
There is ample time to implement the strategy or content learned after a professional development session. ^{1,2}	3.6	3.6
I am reflective on my teaching practices after implementing a new strategy or content to my students. ⁴	4.3	4.2

Notes: ^aStrongly agree = 5, agree = 4, neutral =3, disagree=2, strongly disagree=1. 1,2=experiences; 3=perceptions; 4=influence

Action Research Cycles

During the first week of the cycle, the teachers engaged in whole school professional development on a particular topic or strategy. An administrator, a department chair or lead teacher, or a guest speaker delivered the professional development. During week two, the

teachers met within their departments to plan and implement the strategy for lesson delivery. The teachers also developed rubrics with which to grade the assessments and/or artifacts that were produced by students as a culminating task for the lesson. Lesson delivery, observations, and feedback occurred during week four. During this time, the instructional leadership team, which is comprised of the department chairs, instructional coaches, coordinators, and administration, conducted observational rounds of the teachers as they implemented the lessons. At the conclusion of the observations, the instructional leadership team met to discuss the observations. The discussions centered on implementation of the strategy in the context of Common Core and also the implementation of the strategy within the content area. Week five was the reflection and recommendation stage where the department chairs were tasked with bringing back the information to their departments based on the instructional team feedback. During week five, the departments analyzed student assessments and artifacts to see how well the student grasped current content by incorporating the strategies into their lessons.

Summary of Professional Development Data

The whole group professional development sessions took place once a month between August 2015 and December 2015. The whole group professional development marked the start of a new cycle and during the entire action research project, the school engaged in four cycles. There was no whole group professional development during the month of November due to the weeklong holiday break of the school district. The professional development topics were as follows: Student Collaboration and Discussion; Reading Strategies; Low Stakes, High Stakes Writing; and Department Data Analysis.

At the conclusion of the first whole group professional development, which marked the start of cycle one, 30 people (43% of participants) completed the professional development

evaluation. The professional development evaluation was completed online using Google forms. There were ten Likert-like scale questions and two open-ended response questions. The topic of the whole group professional development was student collaboration and discussion strategies.

The teachers indicated on the open response questions that they learned strategies for fostering interaction and grouping students; ideas for keeping students engaged; and providing them access to the content.

The second open-ended question asked teachers about next steps in terms of implementation. The teachers responded that they would incorporate the strategy in the classroom and during lesson planning; they would also incorporate more quick writes and peer sharing to increase student engagement and participation. The teachers also mentioned the importance of bell-to-bell instruction. They also felt that smaller group professional development would be better for less distraction instead of the whole group professional development sessions. The teachers shared on the evaluations that they wanted time to collaborate with colleagues after professional development so they could better plan how to implement the strategy within their department and or classroom.

At the conclusion of cycle one, the teachers and the administrators indicated on the post-cycle reflections that the following changes would be made in moving forward to cycle two: provide better examples and clarification of the end product of the cycle; provide clarity of cycle expectations; increased immediate feedback to drive instruction following observational rounds; increased collaboration time with colleagues during and following whole group professional development; better use of student work samples as analysis for improvement; utilize department rubrics to guide discussion; and, breakdown assessment data to find weak points in instruction before next assessment.

At the conclusion of the second whole group professional development, which marked the start of cycle two, 25 people (36% of participants) completed the professional development evaluation. The professional development evaluation was completed online using Google forms. There were ten Likert-like scale questions and two open-ended response questions. The topic of the whole group professional development was reading strategies.

The teachers indicated on the open response questions that they learned pre-reading and reading strategies and how to improve access for students to what they are teaching.

The second open-ended question asked teachers about next steps in terms of implementation. The teachers responded that they would continue to use variation in teaching strategies throughout the year; they will use the strategies in the next few weeks in their lessons; and that they wanted to collaborate with their department colleagues first to see how the strategies can be implemented.

At the conclusion of cycle two, the teachers and the administrators indicated on the post-cycle reflections that the following changes would be made in moving forward to cycle three: ensure that student samples or artifacts closely align with the implemented strategy; include increased talk time for students as part of next cycle focus; and they would use their mistakes to reteach the areas that were missed and reanalyze student work for improvement.

At the conclusion of the third whole group professional development, which marked the start of cycle three, 64 people (91% of participants) completed the professional development evaluation. The professional development evaluation was completed online using Google forms. There were ten Likert-like scale questions and two open-ended response questions. The topic of the whole group professional development was writing strategies (low stakes and high stakes writing) with a guest speaker from New York. The guest speaker was well known with the

teachers, which can account for the high participation in the post professional development evaluation.

The teachers indicated on the open response questions that they learned in-depth ways of improving students using academic vocabulary and improving their writing; talk time for teachers should be less and students talk time should be more; students talk is essential to getting them to learn; they felt this professional development was one of the best they ever had because it came from a fellow teacher and it was relevant.

The second open-ended question asked teachers about next steps in terms of implementation. The teachers responded that they would talk less and focus on student talk time and practice.

At the conclusion of cycle three, the teachers and the administrators indicated on the post-cycle reflections that the following changes would be made moving forward to cycle four: increase student talk and less teacher talk; increase use of academic vocabulary in lessons; and incorporate purposeful grouping for academic conversations and student practice.

At the conclusion of the fourth whole group professional development, which marked the start of cycle four, 39 people (56% of participants) completed the professional development evaluation. The professional development evaluation was completed online using Google forms. There were ten Likert-like scale questions and two open-ended response questions. The topic of the whole group professional development was department data analysis.

The teachers indicated on the open response questions that they learned about depth of knowledge (DOK); smarter balance (SBAC) claims, targets, and anchor standards; how to view interim assessment test scores; and how to use data to plan instruction.

The second open-ended question asked teachers about next steps in terms of implementation. The teachers mentioned that they would apply DOK in class; incorporate higher levels of DOK within their lessons; and plan lessons that involve DOK and objectives to support it.

At the conclusion of cycle four, the teachers and the administrators indicated on the post-cycle reflections that the following changes would be made in moving forward to second semester: increase Depth of Knowledge (DOK) and incorporate DOK into lesson objectives, align rubrics and assessments with all strategies to incorporate DOK; and use of data to drive instruction and planning.

Table 4.2 illustrates a comparison of the four professional development evaluations results using MS Excel 2011. The goal was to gather information regarding the perceptions of the participants at four different time points in the cycle as they participated in whole group professional development. It is important to note that although the whole group professional development sessions are mandatory to attend, the completion of the post professional development evaluations are options. The optional participation accounts for the variance in participation with regards to the post professional development evaluation data. According to the descriptive statistical analysis, the overall mean of each professional development was as follows: PD1: M= 4.32, PD2: M=4.12, PD3: M=4.57 and PD4: M= 3.98. Professional development session three shows a higher means for each response item in terms of the professional development satisfaction and experiences. The first whole group professional development session revealed a higher amount of teacher enthusiasm due to the start of the year; however as the cycles progressed there was a higher teacher attrition rate in participation of the evaluations. The overall difference in the responses among the means is also higher for

professional development three. This can be accounted for in terms of the guest speaker present at the professional development session as well as the activities incorporated during the session that were relevant to the each specific content area. The specific differences in the professional development sessions are addressed in the qualitative findings below.

Table 4.2

Statistical Analysis for Professional Development Evaluations

<u>Response</u>	<u>Mean</u>			
	PD #1 (n=30)	PD #2 (n =25)	PD #3 (n=64)	PD #4 (n=39)
The objectives for today’s session were clearly stated.	4.5	4.4	4.7	4.2
Today's session was aligned to its stated objectives.	4.5	4.4	4.6	4.3
Today's session was useful and practical.	4.4	4.1	4.7	3.9
Today's session advanced the development of my content knowledge.	4.0	3.9	4.3	3.7
Today's activities increased my capacity to use data to improve my practice.	4.1	4.0	4.3	3.8
The facilitators of today's session effectively modeled appropriate instructional strategies.	4.5	4.4	4.7	4.1
The facilitators of today's session incorporated our experiences into today's activities.	4.3	4.2	4.7	4.1
Time was allocated effectively today to deepen my understanding of the presented material.	4.2	3.8	4.7	3.9
There were opportunities during today's session to collaborate on shared activities.	4.3	4.0	4.6	4.1
Today's activities were relevant for my classroom-related needs.	4.4	4.0	4.4	3.7

Notes: ^aStrongly agree = 5, agree = 4, neutral =3, disagree=2, strongly disagree=1.

Findings

The findings are organized by research question. First I discuss the experiences of teachers and the instructional leadership team as they participate in the action research model. Next, I discuss the critical components of an effective professional development model based on

the perceptions of the teachers and instructional leadership team. Lastly, I explore how the professional development model influenced teaching with respect to teacher reflection, teacher collaboration, teaching literacy in the core, and overall changes in teacher practice. Figure 4.1 shows a conceptual map that organizes the major themes that emerged from the data around the research questions.

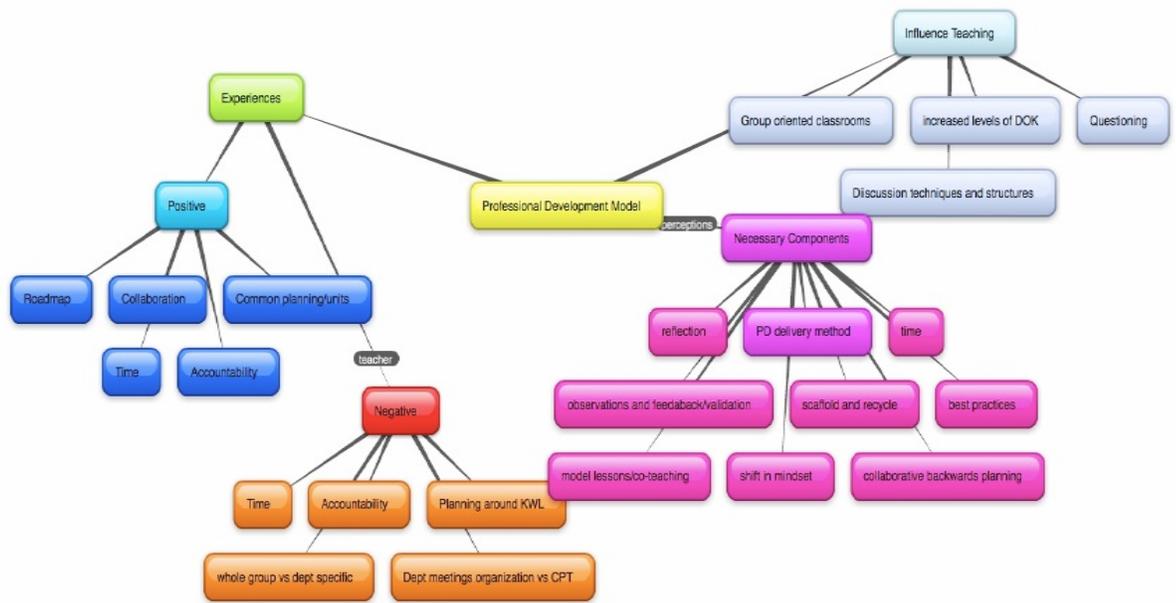


Figure 4.1 Action Research Concept Map

Research Question #1 and 2: The Experiences of Teachers and Instructional Leadership Team Members

My first two research questions examined the experiences of teachers and instructional leadership team members as they participated in the professional development model in the form of action research. From the data and interviews, five major themes surfaced with regards to teacher experiences during the professional development model: time, communication, collaboration, accountability, and best practices.

Time. Time is a factor when it comes to any effective professional development cycle. Although there was not significant difference with regards to time for implementation in the pre

and post survey data ($p=0.39158$), the data from the post professional development evaluations and interviews with the teachers and the members of the instructional leadership team, revealed that time played a major factor in the professional development cycle. 87% of participants from the whole group professional development session one agreed and strongly agreed that time was allocated effectively to deepen understanding of the presented material. This compares to session two with 64% of participants who agreed and strongly agreed; session three with 95% of participants who agreed and strongly agreed; and, session four with 67% of participants who agreed and strongly agreed.

The staff members reported the timeframe of the cycle as a necessary evil that both had positive and negatives effects on their collaboration, implementation, and reflection. Teachers discussed how time is necessary to be able to process the concept presented during professional development. After the first professional development delivery, one teacher stated in the post-professional development evaluation:

Need time to collaborate with my colleagues so we can talk about how to best use some of these strategies first. Then, you'll see more and more of these strategies used in the classroom.

Another teacher explained during an interview,

So time is vital. To have something and be able to digest it and take it apart and say ok this is what I'm going to do I'm going to change and of course you have to come back together and present it to and share amongst your department. And say I'll use it and lets do this and come up with a common lesson or assessment to do this and try that. But I don't think there was enough time to really talk about. We didn't really have time to sit down and talk about amongst the department.

The individual interviews with teachers affirmed that more time is needed to effectively collaborate on the strategy presented during the whole group professional development session.

The teachers were given a time frame within which to be introduced to a particular strategy, discuss the strategy within the department, implement the strategy with observation,

and submit an artifact as evidence of implementation. Members of the instructional leadership team discussed during a focus group how the time constraints led to a forced accountability in terms of the model. One instructional coach stated:

Well with the time constraints it kind of made them have to be on it. So you couldn't crawl certain things out and it kind of pushed some teachers to go at a faster pace than they usually do because they did want to try to meet the deadlines of having their students assessed and having that student work to bring back to the meetings. So in that sense I think that was good.

Teachers and instructional leaders shared that time, while constricting, provided a definitive start and end for the staff in terms of expectations and if time was left to be too abstract then there would never be a time for common discussions around what was working and what was not. In an interview with a PE teacher, the teacher talked about the following positive aspects of time during the cycle.

For us, it was positive all the way because it got us going in the direction of, now we kind of understand what is expected of Common Core and us. It really put us because we are not expected to do the same amount of writing as a classroom teacher so all it did for us was put us online for what we should be doing. It kind of made us in the beginning of the month 'ok this is what we should be doing this month' and we were on point and we just added to it along the way.

Teachers also discussed how time can inhibit them from following up within their department regarding the professional development content that was covered in the whole group setting and also following up with their students to ensure that the strategy being taught helps to master a particular skill. One teacher shared her frustration during an interview in the following comment:

It's not even quick follow-up. There was no follow up to the professional development as departments because now were meeting; next week we're assessing artifacts. Then we're immediately coming up with the next one. Four weeks. The cycle is irritating me.

Administrators also shared some of the teachers' sentiments in the time constraints of the model. They felt that the five-week structure of the model yielded itself to a tight timeline to

present, implement, observe, collect, and reflect. As one administrator stated during an interview:

Time constraints are always hard. The first 20 weeks of course are challenging in itself because there's a lot of things that come up that you have to do and you need to do and then trying to squeeze them in and trying to figure out what's best and what works best, that's a challenge. Administratively I can attest to where we get caught up in 'this is the cycle. Oh my God we have to get ready for the next strategy!' and I don't think they have gotten really good at this one but we have to do another strategy because that's what the time says. It says we have to introduce. So administratively that was hard because even though you know that they probably need another couple weeks, just to kind of get good, or practice, or implement or fine tune the strategy, you have to move on. So that was hard for us and then getting the pushback from the departments where that's what they are saying. Administratively saying 'No, we know! We are going to move on.' Knowing that their feelings and our feelings are kind of similar. So that was kind of hard.

In contrast to the discussions about the time constraints, several administrators felt that the five weeks allowed for a more streamlined focus of the strategies. As one administrator stated:

As far as the time frame for them to go over the common assignments for some groups it was enough time for some groups it wasn't but again that was because they were learning the structure of how admin wanted it done for this year.

I mean the timeline is tight but I don't know if I would change it because I would want them to stick to such a tight time frame because it makes them more focused.

Some staff felt that the timeline was too tight in order to complete the cycles while others felt that the time line was adequate in order to implement the strategies and present artifacts. The timeline set a pace school-wide that allowed the departments to address strengths and weaknesses every five weeks while maintaining a focus for each cycle that could be easily managed.

Communication. Communication was a key factor mentioned in the interviews and focus groups by the teachers and the administrators. Some teachers expressed communication as being a missing link between the action research process and the professional development

model in which they were presently engaged. Two teachers shared their frustration, during a focus group, surrounding the lack of communication:

A: You know that's the disconnect that, and I'm not speaking as a department chair, I'm speaking as teacher that we are having is that there's a disconnect with the information that's given to us.

B: There's a whole lot of this last minute, one day because somebody must be telling somebody this is what has to take place. I think inherently who are nice intelligent people are telling you 5 minutes. Leave your classroom and come here. This week were going to do this, next week were going to do that. And yes the guideword is flexibility but after a while when flexibility becomes the norm there is no consistency.

There seemed to be a disconnect in the information that was being disseminated by the instructional leadership team and what was being received by the teachers. The administrators shared that the communication of the expected outcomes did not come across as fluid and that needed to occur if the professional development model was going to be successful. One administrator stated:

I think the communication of the expected outcome; you know at the end of the 5 weeks or 7 weeks whatever it's modeled towards, it seems unclear. You can say it. You can put it in an email and then there's just when given the opportunity to talk about it. There just seems to be confusion.

However, the administrators also believed that the professional development model communicated school wide expectations to the staff and that those expectations would be carried out within their departments and classrooms. One administrator talked about the positive aspects of the model in terms of communication:

You are allowed to give the staff a say so in what type of professional developments that are given to them. I feel that is what is most important is that the staff is actually getting items that they need and that they know that the items are being observed throughout the year so its not a shocker so they are actually getting PD on what their observations should encompass.

Teachers and staff agreed that the communication needs to be more department specific in order to address the needs on a micro level. Teachers stated that when communication

becomes more individualized, the staff takes ownership of the objectives and sets departmental goals to meet to them. One teacher suggested that:

So um I think it would be time consuming but I think that would be the way to go is to sit down with each department and say how do we, lets come up with a strategy so that we can all grow professionally through this process and what are those objectives and how do we meet those objectives.

Administrators stated that the communication that occurred in the department meetings gave the model an added strength that was lacking before. The model allowed conversations to take place that where the teachers became active participants in the process. The following comment was made in regards to communication:

I think it has opened up a lot of doors of communication because people or department chairs would come to us I think more so than before about the concerns of the department or the struggles in the department and then well do what we need to do to either go to the next meeting or give her tips, him or her tips on what clarity that needs to happen because most of the time for me its been about clarity.

Overall, the teachers and instructional leaders felt that their participation in the action research initiated conversations between teachers, within departments, within grade levels, among administrators, and across the entire staff. The experience in the professional development model allowed the staff to see their strengths and weakness in terms of communicating information that was critical to the success of implementing a successful professional development model.

Collaboration. The professional development model created a collaborative design that teachers saw as beneficial to the action research process. The pre and post survey did not indicate a significant difference in the collaboration that occurred during department meetings ($p=0.14119$); however, the post professional development evaluations showed that 83% of participants agreed and strongly agreed that there were opportunities to collaborate during the whole group professional development session one; 76% during professional development two;

91% during professional development three; and, 82% during professional development four.

During the interviews and focus groups, several teachers shared their input on the value of collaboration in terms of not only strengthening their department but the school community as a whole. One department chair stated:

I think those of use who are observing we actually see first hand some good things that you can right away take back for yourself actually you know its hard to articulate sometimes for others when people don't see it but for us who have seen it and for the parents we have a lot of good things not to say you have actually observed a lot of good things. So I think that's a positive real positive sense of community.

The following is one elective teacher's perspective on collaboration:

So I think it's the collaboration amongst peers and colleagues and that's probably for me the most valuable thing that I can get and you know the things presented. Sometimes they are new and its good to be reminded of these things and we've all heard it through different professions in school and its good to be reminded but I think at the end of the day its not something that you take and can go to your classroom and start doing it right away so I think the sharing among teachers is very important.

Another teacher, a math teacher talked about the importance of collaboration and how the model contributed to that collaborative process:

Collaboration. Collaboration because now everybody has a little bit to offer. It kind of makes the lessons flow or click better when people see things in a different light. So even though Eric might be saying something then ok how about this situation you know what about this and so we can add to it or take stuff out if its just too much going on.

A history teacher brought a renewed perspective on the collaborative process that the professional development model brought about. She talked about collaboration within the different departments but creating cohesion among the different levels of student which they teacher.

I don't know about seeing success. I see it what we are looking for and maybe there is some refinement we will keep doing along the way. As were developing, we are discussing and sharing how each level can still get what it wants and allow for student success. If we want students for instance to paraphrase the declaration of independence, how can we make that look like something through the various levels where there's agreement on a minimum but its going to be something a special da y class, an el class

can achieve. And not just say here's what we want everybody to do and let's see how well they do at it. It's thinking in advance and all teachers having to share that responsibility not just the el and special day class teacher.

The collaboration between the teachers and instructional leaders helped to develop a teaching and learning dialogue between the two. One administrator describes the symbiotic relationship that developed due to the professional development model as follows:

So you are learning things that are unclear to certain groups or you're learning things that you know they want to be provided support with so you're constantly learning from them and as a coach that's what you need. You need to know what they need so that you can address it and so we're constantly trying to figure out a way to address it but then still get the results that we desire from the staff.

The administrators and the teachers identified that they benefited from the collaboration amongst the staff. The administrators identified that the professional development model opened doors that allowed them to learn from the teachers in terms of their instructional needs; however, it also allowed teachers to learn from administration in terms of expectations in the classroom and school-wide.

Accountability. Accountability seems to be an issue when it comes to any kind of implementation and in the case of this professional development model; accountability was a positive and negative factor that was seen as a necessary evil. In the case of this action research project, accountability was a positive factor because the model forced teachers to a structured plan that would be monitored and reviewed and edited every 5 weeks. The administration talked about the accountability as a means to get teachers to not only share best practices but to contribute equally to the monthly department meetings. One administrator stated the following during a focus group discussion:

In my eyes it's the same thing just forcing them to not be in the small little cubbies doing whatever you know because they would branch out and they would be doing stuff but to me it's a tighter model and um it's the student work piece was not as it was not visible as much as it is right now. Some people would bring it and some people wouldn't. Or they

wouldn't talk about it in the manner in which they needed to talk about it. So I don't know whoever that was.

In a separate interview with an administrator, she talked about accountability as a major strength in the professional development model because it created consistency across the campus, within the departments, and it made for better teams across departments.

Knowing that there's a cycle every 5 weeks that there's something. And there's everybody on the same schedule so it's not this department is moving faster or as a better consistent team, everybody's on the same cycle. So it's a general expectation school-wide.

A math teacher talked about the professional development model in terms of checks and balances and keeping everyone within their department accountable to one another. "Its like a check and balance thing, so what else can we do better in the classroom so things like that so what can we get from each other. So that's the best part right there."

The instructional coaches saw the professional development model as a form of accountability that prepared the staff for administration expectations. One instructional coach had the following to say during an interview:

I feel the organization, the map, the roadmap, is probably the strengths. You are allowed to give the staff a say so in what type of PDs that are given to them. I feel that is what is most important is that the staff is actually getting items that they need and that they know that the items are being observed throughout the year so its not a shocker so they are actually getting PD on what their observations should encompass.

Accountability was also a negative factor because if there was no follow up within the 5-week cycles, the accountability was evident based on what was observed and implemented by the teachers. The following is a comment that was made by one of the teachers during an interview:

Excerpt: "...the staff is actually getting items that they need and that they know that the items are being observed throughout the year so its not a shocker." "I feel accountability has to be key in order to know if they are actually taking what is learned or given in the PD and using it in their classrooms."

The commentary indicates that accountability is necessary in order for the professional development model to be implemented with fidelity. One instructional coach stated in her interview, “I feel accountability has to be key in order to know if they are actually taking what is learned or given in the PD and using it in their classrooms.” The model allows teachers to not only be held accountable but also hold themselves accountable to the school wide expectations.

The history department chair has the following to say in terms of the model and accountability:

It gives a direction for staff development and forced buy in: people have to participate and have to come to some agreement at least on the surface. Do I see that as a good thing? Yes and I am rebel without a cause. Yes.

The teachers and the instructional team agreed that there was a renewed sense of accountability that was brought about with the professional development plan. The three major components of the model as identified by the staff: plan, implement, and assess, allowed them to create a sense of uniformity and instructional focus as they progressed through the model.

Best practices. The professional development model allowed the teachers to learn from one another on a professional level. The teachers shared best practices within their department and across departments. This made for a strong development of vertical articulation and horizontal articulation. As one teacher stated in the focus group among all department chairs when referencing the strength of the model, “Common focus for everybody, the whole school. So everybody gets on board with one type of train of thought.”

The focus group with the department chairs confirmed that the professional development model developed that school-wide cohesion that was necessary for Common Core implementation.

During the department chair focus group, several teachers talked about the unknowns of Common Core and how the professional development model allowed them to share what they

were doing to implement Common Core within their disciplines. The sharing of best practices helped to ease the frustration of having to implement a new standard, new curriculum, and rising to new expectations. The following is what one teacher had to say about best practices during a focus group session:

Another positive for us is the alignment of our department because we kind of didn't know what common core was going to look like. We didn't know what is a rigorous question in PE so some of those questions we are able to answer. Doing these assessments monthly has helped us just get online where all of us are doing the same thing. Where for years some of us were in the classroom. Some of us weren't. Some of us were testing on nutrition and fitness, some of us weren't. So now we're aligned and that's been a positive for us because we were a little stressed on what it's supposed to look like and what they expected of us and now we kind of ,we feel like we feel comfortable with what we want.

As the teachers began to share best practices among departments, many of their questions were answered in terms of how to implement Common Core school-wide and by department. The professional development model provided a template not only for expectations but also a source of learning that was useful to the entire staff that would benefit the instructional goals of the school. One administrator gave the following example of the benefits of sharing best practices during an interview:

On a team I have the science teacher look at an English teacher. How is she managing these kids and how is she doing writing? Or how is she structuring group reading that you could use in Science? Really trying to get them ... it's not me, it's the way ... as a team if these kids are the same instruction consistently as they go from subject to subject it becomes, "This is how we process information no matter what class we're in." That's the big skill that kids need when they come out of school, when they go to college. You're learning information, but you're learning how to process information, and learning how ... what do you gain from the information? It may be Science information; it may be History information. I think we're going to gain a lot by getting teachers, that don't quite get it for some reason, to see other teachers that are doing it. Hopefully, it'll get them to independently take their own time to say, "Let me go see what she's doing on this piece. Let me go see." Because once they become independent seekers of knowledge to improve themselves, the better ...

A major characteristic of sharing best practices during the professional model was having the teachers deliver the professional developments for their peers. Teachers felt that when their peers delivered the professional development based on strategies that they were currently using in their classes, they felt validated when it came to their own instructional practice. One teacher expressed their feelings during a focus group about the benefits of sharing best practices:

I think to routinely have professional developments it kind of helps us maintain that mindset that this pedagogy is always adapting, with every professional development there's something new that we could try. Its just like Carl ...said, "So you don't have to remain stagnant and do the same thing over and over again."

In an interview with the instructional coaches, one instructional coach stated her expectations of the model in terms of moving forward and sharing best practices:

...I also think that it would be nice for teachers to be able to share out what they are using so that they can feel validated and that they are using some of the strategies or that they have other strategies that they are using that they can share with their department and the other departments that's going to sit in with their meeting. So if they do English history they can hear what each other are doing. So just to validate that because some people are excellent strategies which may not be the strategies that presented in PD but tie in with it and I feel that it is easier for them to accept it coming from their peers more so than it just being hand down, feeling that its being handed down from administration.

As the teachers and the instructional coaches shared about how the model should progress moving forward, the peer professional development delivery method was an important indicator of how to share best practices amongst colleagues. Their excitement to see the strategies being modeled by their colleagues was also echoed by the administration. One administrator pointed out the following during an interview:

With each PD there was something new that stood out that you want to capture. Having an expert come in, which in itself just gives a certain amount of relief and they see it from a different perspective, and he was great. Having department chairs lead a PD was awesome because their peers received it differently than us doing it.

The feelings of the staff sharing best practices received overwhelming responses not only in the interviews and focus groups but also in the professional development responses. The staff

felt that sharing best practices provided teachers with a different perspective and allowed everyone to feel validated in terms of their contribution to the instructional goals of the school.

Research Question #3: The Perceptions of Teachers and Instructional Leadership Team Members as to their Beliefs on Necessary Components

My third research question examined the perceptions of teachers and instructional leadership team members in what they believe to be the most necessary components of an effective professional development model. During the data collection and interviews, six major themes surfaced with regards to their perception during the professional development model: professional development delivery method, observation, feedback, reflection, professional development scaffolding, and common planning time.

Professional Development Delivery method. When asked about how the professional development model can be changed to better suit the needs of the school, many teachers felt that the professional development sessions would be best presented within their departments or smaller groups as opposed to a whole group setting. The responses from the pre-survey with regards to whole group professional development versus department specific professional development showed that 66% of teachers agreed and strongly agreed that whole group professional development is beneficial while 95% agreed and strongly agreed that departmental specific professional development is beneficial. The post-survey responses showed that 95% of teachers agreed and strongly agreed that whole group professional development is beneficial while 94% agreed and strongly agreed that departmental specific professional development is beneficial. A comment received from a teacher in the evaluation after the first professional development meeting stated, “I think a smaller group PD by department would be better. Having all the staff together is pretty distracting.” Several teachers echoed that same sentiment but for different reasons. During the interviews and focus groups, several teachers felt that professional

development within their departments would make for a more personalized setting on how to implement the strategies. In a focus group held with the department chairs, one teacher stated the following:

I think pd in your subject matter, I see the validity of doing it as a whole group so that we're all on the same page and I totally agree that's a big benefit but I would like someone to come in in just 6th grade English and maybe and we did just have someone come in and help us out with the unit of study and that was very beneficial but and we had the opportunity to meet with him as just us English teachers and that was very beneficial. So more things like that that are just geared more toward your subject matter. That would be especially if we have something new like units of study having more of those kinds of things for the English department I think would be beneficial.

In a separate focus group with the math department, the feelings surrounding professional development delivery were mirrored with that of the department chairs. One teacher emphasized the following:

I think what should happen is we should do it within our departments because when they present over there wherever I go to; whenever I go to those pd's its always history examples, English examples. It's now the writing process. Yes I understand the writing process and the reading. We have to do but it's always here's how it looks in English, here's how it looks in history, or here's how it looks in science. That's it. So we're like in math 'Well you know, how do you want it to look in math?' But we do our own pd's where we try to do the writing part. So I think that if it's structured well, it could work for the math because we do a lot of writing in the math department, I feel we do.

Within that same focus group, another teacher stated the following:

When its comes to pd, I feel like ok so let the math department, let us meet as a department and we focus on how to implement the frayer model, not frayer model, the four fold. Because if it's a really big room with everybody, it's kind of like in college, this is a lecture hall man. It's huge. It's sort of a mess, but when its just like the math department now I'm not even going to be distracted by how English and science are doing it because even though they say 'just worry about math', yeah but I'm still kind of curious about how they are doing it. There's still a distraction to me but if it's just with the math department it like ok we can go straight to the point also since we are in a smaller setting we feel more comfortable in talking about what works and what might not work and things like that too.

The professional development delivery format left a lot of teachers feeling like they needed to see the strategies introduced within the departments and not in a whole group setting.

This concern was expressed mainly because the whole group did not allow for the content specificity of how to implement the strategies which is what the individual departments wanted to see.

The administration felt that the whole group setting was necessary because it not only allowed for teachers to receive an overview of the strategy but it also allowed exposure to the strategy which provided the administration with a reassurance that everyone had been trained, even if it was at a surface level. One administrator talked about the whole group professional development setting as a benefit to the model and stated the following during an interview:

I think the delivery of the pd because then its really tailored school wide. We know we are working on writing. We know this is what we are looking for. We know this is what we are looking at so then it helps tailor the focus for the administrator or for myself to walk in classes like 'Ok, we just had a pd on group discussion techniques or reading or writing so that's what I'm looking for. Let me see evidence of it.' So I think that's really helped. Although I don't see it per se, I think that's really helped narrowing the focus so when I have a conversation with someone, I can refer back to it and they can't say 'well we have never been trained. We have never gotten that' and its like 'no, you just got that 2 weeks ago or remember 2 weeks ago.' So it's an immediate reference point for the staff and for me to be able to reference something. Where I don't have to depend on did this happen 5 years ago. Did this happen when they went to training on Saturday? Did they get this? You know it's really focused on what we have done and what we have delivered.

Although the administration felt that whole group professional development was necessary for the staff in terms of exposure to the strategies, both the teachers and the administrators seemed to agree that implementation of the strategies occurs best when department experts present them. One administrator stated the following in an interview with regards to small group professional development delivery:

I think we need representation of each department to present because then it's 'How does it look in science? How does this look in history?' Because I think that's what happened with the reading strategies, we had a history person present and a English department person present and it's just like 'ok what does this look like.' And then what does this look like in math and because there is not a particular person presenting the math you know that department they have their own person. You are their expert so I think if we

can find different experts in each content, then this is what we need in our department; this is how it and this is what writing looks like in our department so this is what we are going to do. That's probably one of the things we need to work on to make it all move.

The teachers recognized that they want the presentation of the information to be directly aligned to their content. Although they see the overall picture, it makes more sense when teachers can deal with the intricacies of their own content material and break it down so they can apply the specific tasks and activities within the classroom.

Observations. A key component of the professional development cycle seemed to be the observations. Following a professional development session and departmental collaboration on how the strategy was to be implemented, department chairs and administration would meet to discuss the observations. Observational rounds were conducted to observe the implementation of the strategy across the various disciplines and also how it was being implemented within a discipline. The observations played a critical part in the professional development cycle because it gave the teachers and the administration a bird's eye view into whether the instructional strategies were being implemented and if they were impacting lesson planning, pedagogy, and departmental conversations. Based on the professional development topic, the observations became more streamlined and focused. One department chair mentioned the following in a focus group:

We have all this up here but if our target was like reading and writing, let's say those two things. Why don't we just go look for reading and writing because that's what we're trying to see everybody do? Instead of all this other stuff, you get what I'm saying because otherwise I get real distracted with this like what I'm actually looking for. I'm looking for so much when really only talked about these topics right here and so makes it a bit more focused when you go into the room.

The streamlined focus of the observations was a positive for the department chairs as well as the support staff; however, the instructional coaches mentioned the importance of scaffolding

the observations based on the level of implementation of the teachers and their experience with the strategy. One instructional coach asserts the following during an interview:

I think the observations were beneficial. Do I feel that the feedback that they received? If most were receptive to it and they had some guidance as to what to do. I think it would have been. So for some yes and for some no because again I think its good that we get to see what's going on but I feel their support has to be stronger for those who are still not implementing the things that we are expecting to see from them.

A second instructional coach echoed the following sentiment of her colleague during an interview:

I like to think of it as we're on a continuum so once we do these PDs its not expected that everyone is going to be at expert level but to see that people are at the beginning level some are in the middle some are already way at the end. So just to be considerate of that spectrum we are observing and what we are talking about um what we need to do and how we need to do it. I think we just have to kind of be considerate of the spectrum you know we want everybody on that spectrum. You cant be over here but you know even if you at the beginning level that shows you have received you have heard and now you're making steps.

Although the observations were deemed to be beneficial, many of the staff wanted the opportunity to observe as well. The observations were only left open to department chairs, administrators, and instructional coaches. The department chairs felt that others within their department needed to view the strategies from the same lens in which they were viewing. During an interview, one department chair stated:

And I think that's where when it becomes opened up it will be a benefit. It is not just the department chair. I respect you as a teacher and you have that same right to observe. And I know in the case of my department, as diplomatically as I can say it: they need to see! I needed to see people walking around here thinking they are great and being respected as great. They're not great! They're growing! I'm growing and I think there has to be an acceptance. I don't care if you have been teaching 10 years or 30 years, you better still be growing to be effective.

Another department chair shared concerns during an interview about the observations being limited to just department chairs doing the observation. She felt that it was important for

other teachers within her department to see what she says as well and the following is what she stated:

One, I think it was good for me to see. Two, it was good for me to see what everybody saw you know when we reflected on it afterward, but I was the only one who participated and I think there were other teachers who would benefit from that. We had one that was not worth my while seeing last go around. I would have rather, I have not seen who I would rather see. Who I saw, I see all the time. Somebody I see regularly and communicate with regularly. So I didn't see anything I didn't already know and then I saw four special education teachers. And yes, a little eye opening, completely. I was able to pat them on the back but I have got 5 teachers. Some I have never seen. So it would have helped me to see them and it was luck of the draw.

The administration seemed optimistic about moving forward with whole school observations and not just limiting it to the department chairs. They felt that the observations were beneficial and to start with the department chairs first, initiated beneficial conversations within the department meetings that were necessary for implementation of the strategies. One administrator talked about the benefits of whole school observations during an interview:

And they (observations) are going to get better because more people are getting exposed to those observations but initially we started with the department chairs and for them to see what their departments, the people in their departments are doing, it was an eye opener for them. A lot of them, they had not been to their co-workers classrooms in that respective, in the lens of trying to focus in on what the students are getting and what the teachers are doing. They would be in there maybe hit or miss but not for a structured amount of time looking for specific things. They hadn't done it in years from my understanding. So that part was good but then when we circulated another group in there and they were able to see, it was like an aha! Moment...

The structured observations were purposeful in that they provided department chairs with a foundation that could be used to develop observational rounds on a larger scale with all teachers within their department. The teachers and the administration saw first hand the strengths and the weaknesses of the professional development model as it was being implemented.

Feedback. In alignment with the observations, were the conversations about feedback. The teachers saw the benefit in providing feedback to and receiving feedback from their

colleagues. The administrators saw the benefit of giving feedback to their staff. Both the teachers and the administrators felt that feedback following the observations was a necessary component if the professional development model was going to be successful and without the feedback component, then teacher growth would remain stagnant. One teacher shared the following thoughts during a focus group:

I'm thinking once you start seeing your colleagues work; let's say my math situation, we have been fortunate. We've seen each other quite a lot. Especially 7th and 8th grade, we have seen each other work a lot because we have been pulled out the last three years. I think, once that happens a lot of barriers start breaking down because once you start opening doors to everybody you are not worrying about who is coming in there you just do what you do and you are now I think willing to hear some feedback. Good bad or indifferent, I think it only helps you as a professional. One thing is it helps me get better, be more efficient; it's respect for my time in the long run I think. So I don't mind some negative feedback, whatever it is. Just the more constructive feedback I can get, I just want to streamline what I'm doing because if I'm going the wrong way about doing something, help me out.

The teachers also felt that there should be a standard when giving feedback and follow through in terms of observations and accountability.

I just want to make the comment about last time when we went to different classes, and this particular class that we went to observe and some of the problems that were noted then are still there today. So for me I'm taking it to mean that we are doing this process but we are not effectively giving feedback to the ones who need it the most.

The teachers felt that feedback needed to be meaningful following an observation so that the feedback initiated both a reflective response within the teacher but also created a working relationship between the teacher and the administrator so that teacher growth could occur.

During the math department focus group, the teachers were very specific regarding how they felt about the feedback that had been provided during the professional development model. Some of the feedback that was received was department wide and was presented to the entire department in the form of an observation feedback sheet while some feedback was more

individualized and in person. One teacher shared the following deficiency in the model in terms of how feedback is delivered:

I think that's where we were lacking and not getting and going back to what we were doing last year and being the first year that I was teaching, I like that they would come in and then we would still have a second period that we would meet together and get feedback from each other. I would hear oh this went well. This maybe could have been a little bit different whatever it was. But it was actually hearing it. This time is just seems like they are coming in here and they will fill out a paper and oh here's what you did but I don't know any details it so just hearing that additional this is why I gave you this...

Another teacher talked specifically about the feedback and how it is currently received but also shared his feelings during an interview on how it should be delivered:

So it's by department right now with these posters; that's why I keep these posters around: what the departments doing overall, the highlights and the challenges. You like things in the middle are kind of like challenges more than they are highlights. Its just mediocre its in the middle but the challenges so for example like discussion in class is a challenge so I guess these observations are meant to give us an overall overview of the department not so much this time to be individualized but I understand what you're saying for us me in participate if I'm trying to reflect on my own just go on and tap me go ahead and give it to me because then I know you're talking about it because some folks are oblivious to the fact that that poster might be talking about them and those challenges.

The teachers appreciated departmental feedback upon the conclusion of observational rounds but there was a strong sentiment that teachers needed to hear individualized feedback based on the observations and what was and was not occurring in the classroom as it related to the implementation of the instructional strategies. This was evident in the pre and post survey data where 77 % of participants stated in the pre survey that they agreed and strongly agreed about receiving feedback from administrators and instructional coaches in regards to observed instructional strategies; however, only 63% agreed and strongly agreed in the post survey about receiving feedback in regards to observed instructional strategies.

The instructional coaches talked about feedback from a different stance. They talked about feedback in the form of modeling lessons and providing a more informal way to support

the classroom teachers during implementation of the strategies and as they progressed through the professional development model. One instructional coach stated the following in terms of supporting teachers and providing feedback:

Well what I did was I started to go into classes and I did a lot of model lessons. Modeling what was presented in the professional development so I even stepped outside of my own box and went to science because you know I'm just not a science person and then health, I went like to health. So I just tried to model what we want them to see and I did do observations also and mine is more informal because I'm a coach. So I'd have like a glows and growth report that I give them and it's just for the teachers only. So I did that looking for what we were presenting in the pd's different times. My best, to be the best way to support, is to show and that's doing the modeling and then I also just do co-teaching lessons just using our strategies from the PD and of course I'm from the AEMP department so I'm incorporating my CLR strategies.

In an interview another instructional coach, she talked about the conversations following observations that she had with teachers. She stated:

I don't feel like I supported enough. So for me its really just the conversations on the observations because I have my own personal ones I would go in and they would get a copy, I would get a copy and it's a reflection piece for them to go back and discuss what would you have done differently, what the skills, what would you use. So it's really validating what they did and coming up with what else can be done within their classes.

Administration talked about how the professional development model made their feedback more streamlined in terms of the school-wide expectations as well creating a one on one conversation that is laser-like in terms of the strategies. One administrator revealed her enthusiasm, in a focus group, about the changes in feedback since starting the model.

Definitely think it has opened the doors to just being more focused in the feedback that I give out to the teachers. So 'what does low stakes writing look like' or 'Not really sure that was a reading strategy, tell me about it. Come talk to me.' And it opens that debate for people who will debate all night, if I stayed, about that's not a reading strategy.

The staff, both teachers and instructional leaders saw feedback as an opportunity to improve practice no matter what they conversation looked like. The teachers believed that the feedback, whether it was positive or negative would result in an increased accountability for

those who were slow to get on board with the model and the instructional leaders saw the feedback as a chance to fill in the gaps on what is evident and what is not in terms of instruction.

Reflection. The reflection component of the professional development model was important to teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators. This was evidenced by the pre (93%) and post survey (96%) responses where teachers agreed and strongly agreed about being reflective on teaching practices after implementing a new strategy or content. All three groups of action research participants believe that reflection is beneficial to the model because it allows the teachers time to process the delivery of the strategy, discuss it and plan with their departments, implement the strategy, and dissect the end result based on implementation and observation feedback. In a focus group with the math department, a teacher provided their own personal definition as they saw reflection related to the professional development model:

But for the cycles that we do each month at the end of artifacts that we bring there is that reflective piece at the end and stuff too so its like ok we get that reflective portion but its like ok so what happens with that so I mean me and the rest of our team we will put in our thoughts but the way I see it reflection is for the purpose of the strategy not particularly the lesson or the standard. How do we introduce this and then how do we refine that same strategy for like the next lesson. That's how I think about it.

One teacher mentioned the following in an interview and how the most beneficial part of the professional development cycle was reflecting:

I think the reflection. When you sit down and you talk to your colleagues you pass around work and you look at work from different samples from different students you get ideas and you say 'how did you' or 'that's a great graphic organizer that you did' or 'I want to use that idea for next time'. So I think for me personally that's what I enjoy the most is when we come together and compare notes and yeah you may have advanced studies and you may have this class and that class but some of the strategies are pretty common too you know you can use it.

An administrator also mentioned that reflections with her teachers were also a benefit to the model because it tied together the observations and the feedback. The following statement was made in an interview:

...The reflective part was good for them. Because for example, we have our history department chair and she's really good, maybe she's really good anyway as far as being reflective but when things are brought to her attention she will go back, she might fight you that day, but then after the fact she'll be like "you know what, I looked at this and I researched it some more, and you are right. I need to" And that's what you want them to do but there are not enough of them doing it.

For many teachers, there just wasn't enough time to really reflect with the aforementioned steps all aligned. In an interview with the instructional coach, she stated the following when it came to reflecting during the professional development cycle:

...To me that would probably be the most beneficial part to see if they even walked away with what we hoped they would walk away with at the PD. And for me I feel its great that you give me information but I also feel that they need time to implement it to plan it and to do it and I don't feel like they were given all that time they needed this first semester. It's kind of like got your PD then you start planning for your cycle. So it wasn't really like you get your PD and then you get another session to work through that to see how that can be incorporated in your department and then you go plan. So for me I would think that the reflection piece if made available would probably be the most beneficial piece because that would allow us to know what needs to be restructured for the future.

Professional Development Scaffolding. Professional development scaffolding was a major concern that came up among the teachers, instructional coaches, and the administrators. Scaffolding was a major concern because they felt that it was important to revisit all the topics that had been presented during first semester but on a deeper level. Since the teachers felt that the cycles left little room for planning and in depth collaboration prior to implementation, scaffolding of the strategies into second semester professional development sessions was imperative. During an interview with the instructional coach, she mentioned the following:

Do I think that everyone has clarity? Probably not. That's why again revisiting second semester would be useful for them so that we can then see what was it that they were unclear on. How can we make sure that they know what's expected. The delivery like I said I like it. Its just more so of a time constraint that some times it takes others a little bit more time to process and again we have to have some type of accountability pieces for them, be it paper be it whatever its just so that they know and they can kind of write it out kind of structure it for them so they can just fill in the pieces and then can see what it leads to.

Scaffolding of the strategies is crucial to the professional development model because it allows the teachers to implement the strategies with fidelity despite all the constraints of time, district mandates, and lack of clarity during first semester. While talking to one administrator during an interview, she mentioned the importance of scaffolding to ensure that the teachers are comfortable implementing the strategies not only in their department but also within their individual classrooms. The administrator points out the following during the interview:

Go back and look at the strategies that we have already set forth and put out there and the ones that we see as administrators that are not being utilized, to fidelity or with strength behind them or they are just kind of hit and miss, I think we need to revisit them. And maybe it's not a full 5-week cycle. Maybe it's just a refresher like we want to see this. We want you guys to get acclimated to using this in the classroom. We haven't been seeing this. So for the next couple weeks, that's what we want to see. We want you guys to get well versed in these two strategies or whatever it the case may be.

In a separate interview, another administrator compared scaffolding back in the professional development to applying several coats of paint. Her comparison illustrates the following with regards to scaffolding:

... It's just so much. I think trying to put too much into takes away the benefit. They walk away with some of it, and you have to realize you put that 1st coat and now you got to come back with a 2nd coat and maybe a 3rd coat. I think what was hard is that you move to something new every 5 weeks. Before I get a chance to see the coat dry in one room, now I'm starting to paint in another room, and this is still spotty in this other room.

The teachers and the administration were in agreement that the strategies that were introduced first semester need to be scaffolded back into the professional development model for second semester. They felt that in order for full implementation of the strategies to occur across all content areas and school-wide then repeated exposure to the same topics was important to not only create experts but also to provide evidence in the classrooms that the model was beneficial to the instructional program.

Common Planning Time. Common planning time was a major issue that reverberated with teachers throughout the interview, focus groups, and professional development evaluations. Teachers look at common planning time as being sacred time where teachers can meet to share what is working and what is not, plan for next steps, and dissect the data that is necessary to bring about change within their department.

The teachers mentioned having allotted time to plan and that being a necessary component. During an interview, a history teacher mentioned:

We are one of the few departments we don't think we have a weak link because we have seen everybody's strengths. We all can build. We all have weaknesses. We all have strengths. But there's a healthy respect that every teacher is doing his or her best. Every teacher wants students to learn. Every teacher is working hard. And we need time for that and how it's even represented to us. 'You want to do that, do that on your own time. Here's our agenda. 1, 2, 3, 4. Nowhere in this model was built in preparing for a periodic assessment. Now maybe in other departments because of what they did, it was but we were told a week before "here give this periodic assessment and grade it by". It's just not going to happen because we are not there and we haven't had time to get there.

The time to share and collaborate needs to be a priority according to many of the teachers. Common planning time provides added time to department meetings that allow teachers to focus on the plan, implement, and assess portions of the model without feeling obligated to talk about other housekeeping issues.

The instructional coaches talked about the department meetings and having a more structured time to meet that allowed the departments to hone in on what was directly being asked of them in terms of implementation of the professional development model. One instructional coach shared the following concern during an interview:

I feel they could have been, some, could have been more structured because every department is not the same. But again I go back to I feel that they need to be given the common planning time after the PD to still focus in directly on what was covered in the PD. For me and think that would allow them to be more structured in their planning.

In a math department meeting, a teacher stated:

When it comes to time efficiency, letting departments focus on doing what departments do instead of having everybody go over the same thing. If this department needs to work on this, then focus on that.

There also seems to be an increased sense of accountability when it comes to common planning time because teachers feel that this is the time where they can come together to plan, present, implement, and revise. In the math department focus group one teacher talked about common planning time and shared the following feelings:

I would prefer if we have a teacher that is doing the strategy lets see how in our department we can practice implementing the strategy. We are not going to say hey you got to implement it tomorrow but in our next meeting maybe it's the second Tuesday or whatever or in two weeks from this Tuesday. In a smaller department environment maybe folks will be willing to say well you know I'm not going to be put on blast in front of everybody, its just me and my team, you know I will try it out, may be it will make it easier for folks to have deeper discussions.

Another math teacher mentioned in a separate interview, how common planning time can also be used to center the department on the school-wide focus and the departmental focus. In the past, department meetings and common planning time meetings were used to complain or gripe about what was going on with the school instead of what they could build upon. Teachers also mentioned how the structure has changed to not focus so much on what the students cannot do but how to increase to the curriculum for the struggling students.

Sometimes you get the conversation even in common planning time. We really try to shut this down quick, but sometimes it just sneaks in there. These can't do and then I have little Johnny, but we all got little Johnny. You know what I'm saying? We're not focused on little Johnny. We're trying to figure out what this curriculum and the lesson planning going on, where are we going to put all these features in there, that's our focus. Maybe little Johnny is just bored because we're jumping around.

Common planning time facilitates a need for not only creating a focus for the department around the instructional strategies and implementation but it also allows the teachers time to have conversations about the process. The administration shared that the meetings allow them to sit in

on those conversations to gain insight on what some departments are doing well and which departments need more support.

Research Question #4: The Influence of the Professional Development Model on Teaching

My last research question examines the influence the professional development model had on teaching, according to teachers and instructional leaders, in regards to pedagogy, literacy across the content areas, reflection and collaboration. During the data and interviews, three major themes surfaced with regards to the influence the professional development model had on the aforementioned items: reading, writing, and discussion; creating rubrics and assessments; and lesson planning.

Reading, Writing, & Discussion. Reading, writing, and discussion has been the focus of the professional development model in terms of instructional strategies. The teachers, the instructional coaches and the administrators all feel that implementing the strategies school-wide has been a strength for all departments because it had created a unified focus. The P.E. department chair stated the following in a focus group with regards to how the strategies have been a strength for his students in terms of access to academic vocabulary.

For us in PE, since we are not content area, some of the stuff we learned like reading strategies has been a strength I think. It has helped us a lot with things like reading and writing strategies. Especially reading right now. We are going to go into high stakes writing soon but we have really focused on the annotating text and understanding vocabulary for helping reading comprehension students.

In a math department focus group, one math teacher talked about the increased awareness of including reading and writing into their lessons.

And just being more cognitive of the reading and writing pieces that we are being asked to make sure we all have incorporated into our lessons, how that all fits into what we are doing. Format that within lessons or assessments. And then the time frames. So for us, trying to refine.

In a separate interview, a math teacher talked about the strategies with regards to using

them to drive instruction, specifically the discussion strategies.

Again, one of the things is to go from if you've been teaching any length of time, you went from maybe learning how to direct teach when you came out of school. When I came out of school to this common core idea of collaboration which has been going on for a little while, but it sometimes is tough for folks to make that transition. It's real resistance to, "Okay, I'm going to have to let this class go and I might lose control. Maybe I don't have control anyway, I'm really concerned now.

Just to try to give folks some ideas of how they can structure it and even take kids in and out of that situation, so it may not be 20 minutes of total discussion the whole time. You might have to break that up and chunk that up a little bit until you get a little bit better flow going on. I think that's our one thing that we're still struggling with in this department a little bit is folks allowing the kids to drive instruction, drive to talk to the points. You know what I mean.

The focus on specific strategies gave the teachers a clear roadmap on how to drive instruction and how to implement Common Core. The professional development model facilitated a process that included planning, implementation, and assessment. The structure of the model created a smooth transition from discussion to reading to writing that the departments felt was beneficial to integrating the strategies into their content areas. Although there was not significant different in the pre (92%) and post survey (91%) with regards to implementing the strategy within the classroom following professional development, there was a significant difference noted after each whole group professional development session with regards to the presenters modeling how to effectively use each instructional strategy (session one, 90% agreed and strongly agreed; session two, 80% agreed and strongly agreed; session three, 95% agreed and strongly agreed; and session four, 80% agreed and strongly agreed).

The strategies needed to be present within each content area and it was important to see them being implemented in the classrooms. A 6th grade teacher stated the following in a focus group:

I think the changes that we made were to make sure that we had all the items that were on the very top. That's what I told my department, the 6th grade teachers, to make sure that

they had part of what's being evaluated so these four points. So as a staff we made sure that we had that and also that were utilizing discussion strategies. That was our big focus. Even though some people were already doing that we just wanted to make sure that it was evident that we were doing it.

One of the instructional coaches talked about increased discussion in classes that were present when she did observations. The strategies were being implemented and the students seemed to be benefitting from them based on the increased amounts of teacher facilitation and student led conversations.

And I can say that in some classrooms I do see kids being more comfortable in presenting and engaging in discussion and leading their discussion in some classrooms. I do see that. That over time it has become structured better and that they're comfortable with doing it themselves so I have seen that in some ways in my observations.

The administration talked about reading, writing and discussion from the standpoint of a collaborative model that allows the departments to have laser-like conversations that focus in on each strategy one at a time. Once the departments have become proficient at each strategy, then they can begin to fold in one after the other within a single lesson. One administrator mentioned the following in a focus group:

But this is better because you are also focusing on where's your writing strategies going to be? How are you using? So now when they sit and plan and with each cycle they have to include reading, they have to include writing, and then next semester like you said, you've focused on it so you can see how you can include it now you we have to evaluate the lesson and say which of our strategies our are best to help get the content of this lesson across to students. Is writing going to help us do that better? Is it reading? Is it a little bit of both? Once you have done it now you can make some instructional decisions about which one is going to assist in accomplishing the instructional goal.

Another administrator talked about reading, writing, and discussion, in an interview, with regards to content versus context and how the strategies create a bridge between the two that allows the students to access both.

Context and content is totally separate. Forcing them to teach their content but in the context of these strategies, you want them to use the strategies but not within their content. I think that goes into having something written for them. If our focus is writing

like this next cycle is writing, what does that look like in a social studies class? What does low stakes, high stakes writing look like in social studies? So here are some examples. How do we bring in the discussions techniques and have students collaborate and talk to each other and then write that in some form and its still talking about the three branches of democracy or its still talking about the colonies. How do you make them all fit? How do all the strategies that we have been going over, fit in my classroom and still produce the writing piece that were talking about.

Rubrics and Assessments. Common assessments and rubrics seemed to be a common topic with all of the staff as they progressed through the professional development model. The rubrics and assessments were proved to be more beneficial when they were developed by the individual departments and shared amongst one another. Teachers felt that when the district or other entities developed assessments then they did not get a complete picture of how their students were performing in response to their instruction.

I think if you really, like you said if its meaningful, its not, you don't see it like something you just want to get it done with. Sometimes we get assessments like ok lets just go through the motions and get it done. Here you go here are the results. But I think if it's something that meaningful to each department or teachers and they feel like this information really applies to us and students are actually learning through this task or assessment then I think it would be effective because there is buy in from the teachers.

In an interview, a history teacher talked about common assessments and the added benefits for her as well as her department.

Me personally and I think other people would not agree, I don't have a problem with here we go with the assessment. What parts are going to be alike as long as you have some freedom to modify? I don't have a problem with here's a common assessment and everybody talking about it, developing the assessment, and everybody interacting because then some people can help me make my assessment better as opposed to me sitting there on Sunday night at 11 o clock trying to figure out what I need to add.

A PE teacher talked about the assessments as a strength of the professional development model because it allowed the teachers to develop uniformity within their department.

First major strength for us was the development of the assessments. So we are doing the cyclical assessments and as a department it allowed us to all buy in and do the same thing. So that has been a weakness of ours in the past getting everybody on the same page doing the same thing and it's kind of made us uniform overall now. So not only did we

do the monthly assessments together, create the rubric, and then look at the artifacts and then come back and do another one but its allowed us all to collaborate and kind of all do the same thing with all of it now as a department where we given not only the assessment but then were all doing the same kind of common core lessons.

One of the instructional coaches talked about the assessments during an interview and how they allow for common conversations within the department regarding student achievement and creating lesson alignment. She points out the following in regards to assessments:

But being given the time to plan and to know that its really just a common assignment it actually in my opinion makes it easier. Just where do you think your students should be at this point and even if it is an assessment maybe its just 2 questions on this that we are going to look at to make sure that our students are moving in the same direction.

An administrator addressed the assessments with regards to chunking the material so that the students are tested on the skills and not waiting until the unit or content is completely covered. The professional development model attempted to gain a perspective into how the strategies were aiding in placing the content in a contextual framework.

It really made them decide ok this is our culminating task we want to get but we are only going to assess, as a group, the first part of that task so we can really look at the student work and see where kids are in this process. It really made them understand the difference between an assessment versus a culminating task. Like everything doesn't have to be a culminating task when you are sharing student work and so those were the positives where they started to see ok we don't have to wait until 8 weeks, 10 weeks down the line and kids have no idea what's happening and then we realize 10 weeks later like ok this was a horrible task the way we asked it and the product that we are getting is terrible. So it really made them like ok this is the first part of the task ok and this is not what we want. We need to stop. We need to redo. We need to revise. We need to get something different because this is not...so I think the timeline and the frame really allows for that conversation and for people to modify before its too late, before the kids have just totally quit on you so I think that was just a bonus.

The assessments were designed for teachers to be preventative rather than reactive about instruction and become more intentional with their planning and conversations. Although the teachers shared that there was some confusion in the beginning regarding assessments versus artifacts versus culminating task, as the cycle progressed, the departments gained clarity on what

was being asked of them and for what purpose, which was to gain frequent checks for understanding.

Lesson planning. The professional development model was designed to see changes in teacher practice and one of the themes that emerged with regards to changes made was lesson planning. There was a shift in the way teachers planned their lessons once they had participated in the whole group professional development and met with their departments to plan for implementation of the strategies within their content area.

A history teacher talked about how her department modified their lesson planning as a department to include their common strategies.

One thing we have done, I assigned each teacher a month to share a lesson, or a skill or a project or something and we got to see what other people did. As common core was being rolled out, I would do presentations. People would I would say bring in lessons that ask students to do this. We would take lessons we already had, ok now what could we do with them to infuse common core, build common core, instruct common core. I had done a presentation and I have been presenting to the teachers. When we say a reading lesson, it is not just a lesson where they have to read. It is not just a lesson where they have to write and I'm not just giving it lip service. I'm going back doing research, looking for information.

The math department talked about lesson planning and changing the way they plan individually and as a department to not only include the strategies but to bridge their content with the strategies so as not to lose the art of teaching mathematical practices when it comes to learning math. The following is what one math teacher stated during a focus group meeting:

I mean if you find lessons and tweak it but we are finding now is and I think we have all been doing I mean its all concepts. I think we are finding now is if I'm not mistaken is we have to find an incorporative way to get more practice. Not necessarily drill and kill but its got to be I'm not even going to say repetition but its got to be something because the skill has to be there as well as the concept. You got be able to reform even if you don't know what to do you have to be able to do it. I think even at our last meeting we talked about it, you have to find away not necessarily to give them 50 problem but you have to find some more skill based.

Another math teacher talked about lesson planning with regards to reflection and planning that has become more student-centered and creating experiences based on student realia.

For me, now that I'm reflecting, and I'm looking at these lessons, how am I driving my lessons, now I'm looking at complex problems. Like something that involves real life that I can bring it into the classroom and connect the math to it and they solve it so when they come out of it and they see that, for example, a movie or something and like oh I remember doing that problem. Something that is tied to real world problems like pollution, recycling water, whatever it is. Recycling cans whatever kind of impact but it ties into problems for me that's where it came from. Because I'm like what kind of lessons do I have to do, ok now I have to be bigger, now I have to be meaningful. Its not just here's the problem, copy this problem. Now I'm trying to go beyond that.

One administrator talked about the shift she has seen in lesson planning within one of the departments that she supervises.

In history department yes, I can only speak for the departments that I can actually go to the meetings on but for the history department, yes. I saw, typically what they would do is they would take a lesson from that they have created and they would just figure out how to tweak it. Now its more of 'let's figure out what is the end result. What's going to be their culminating task? What's going to be their product to determine whether or not they got it?' Which is what we have been trying to get them to do forever, right? So they backwards planning and that's the goal. What is it that's going to prove whether or not they got it and then what do we need to teach them in order to make sure that happens? And collaboration and using all the strategies and "make sure we put that strategy in" and more so before it was whatever strategy I like. Whatever been working that's what I'm going to use but now its like we got to put this in there so where does it go. So its kind of opening their minds or their teaching styles to incorporate different things, which is a challenge for some and other people its not. So I know for history its been good.

The professional development model has changed the way the departments lesson plan and talk about planning. The conversations now center around a structured focus that begins with a particular strategy, the incorporation of the strategy into teacher practice, the observation of the strategy, and reflection around the strategy. Lesson planning conversations within departments have become purposeful and cohesive instead of doing what is and has been convenient for individuals.

Summary of Findings

The investigation of the perceptions and perspectives of teachers and administrators as they implemented the professional development model in the form of action research confirmed that there is a definite need for school-wide focus in terms of professional development and implementation of school reform.

The experiences of teachers and the instructional leadership team as they participated in the action research model gave way to five key themes based on the survey, evaluations, interviews and focus groups. The five key themes were time, communication, collaboration, accountability, and best practices. Time had a positive and negative connotation with the staff because the staff appreciated the structure of the model with regards to time; however, they did not appreciate that the timeline did not allow for flexibility within the model. In terms of communication, many of the teachers felt that this was an area that needed to be strengthened between them and the administration in terms of timeliness, expectations, and next steps in the cycles. The staff however did feel that communication was enhanced within their department and across the departments because it allowed for conversations that would not have otherwise taken place prior to the model. Prior to the model, many of the departments and even some teachers within departments acted in silos instead of sharing the what and the how of instructional pedagogy. Collaboration seemed to increase as communication increased among the departments and within the departments because the teachers had to collaborate more on the strategies and implementing the strategies. The staff appreciated that there was an increased sense of accountability with the professional development model because not only were they held to such a tight time frame, which was a necessary evil, but there was an accountability factor that everyone had to implement the strategy with fidelity and if someone was not implementing it

with fidelity, there was the expectation that everyone fell on a spectrum of implementation. So there was an assurance that everyone was not going to be an expert on the introduced instructional strategy at the end of each cycle but as long as there was work in progress then there was continuous growth as a department and as a school. There was a lot of sharing of best practices that occurred with the implementation of the professional development model where teachers felt that they learned a lot from their peers. Teachers were able to do see their peers lead professional developments, engage in those professional developments, and walk away with something valuable for their classroom.

The professional development model yielded itself to six critical components of an effective professional development model based on the perceptions of the teachers and instructional leadership team and the themes that emerged from the data. The six critical components were delivery method of professional development, observations, reflection, feedback, scaffolding, and common planning time. The professional development delivery method was a necessary component in the eyes of the teachers and something that was forthcoming with administration. The teachers felt that they wanted to see more small group delivery of the professional development because that is where they could hone in on how the strategy can be used specifically for their department. The administrators felt that the whole group professional development was necessary to provide a complete overview of the strategy in order to ensure that everyone was exposed to the every strategy in the same manner. There needed to be a calibrated delivery of the strategy in order to allow the departments to move forward second semester with content specific delivery of the professional developments. The observations provided insight for teachers and administration. Prior to the model, teachers were not able to see what their colleagues were doing in terms of implementation; however, the

conversations that resulted from the observations were powerful because it created a focus and a roadmap. The observations and conversations became a reflective component within the model because they addressed how to drive instruction with this added lens. The feedback that was received following the observations became more focused and laser-like in terms of creating a point of reference during conversations that was based on the observations; however, many of the departments shared that they wanted to see the feedback become more individualized rather than departmentalized so that people who are on the lower end of the spectrum in terms of implementation were addressed specifically in terms of strengths and weaknesses. The reflection component allowed teachers to advance their professional growth by self-inquiry of their instructional practice and the needs of their students. The teachers felt strongly about scaffolding the same strategies back into the professional development model for second semester. Due to the tight timeline of each cycle, they did not really get a chance to ensure that everyone within their department became an expert on the strategy that was delivered during professional development. The administrators also felt it was imperative that the scaffolding needed to happen so that the staff could become experts not only within their content but also within the context of Common Core implementation. Common planning time was considered a sacred time among teachers and administrators where meetings were focused on collaboration, implementation, and reflective conversations. Both teachers and administrators valued common planning time because it was not only a structured time for addressing the implementation of the strategies but common planning time was also a forum for change during the action research process.

The professional development model influenced teaching with respect to teacher reflection, teacher collaboration, teaching literacy in the core, and overall changes in teacher practice. The themes that emerged in terms of teacher influence was increased presence of

reading, writing, and discussion within classrooms; teacher created rubrics and assessments; and lesson planning. Reading, writing and discussion was occurring in the classrooms however the implementation of the professional development model ensured that all three were occurring in every class, on a daily basis, and that it was being incorporated into every lesson so all students were gaining exposure to literacy. The creation of rubrics and assessments was built into the model to develop a check for understanding for the teachers and the students. The rubrics and assessments created a more cohesive model because it set expectations for the teachers as well as the students. The assessments were not defined in a traditional sense such as a culminating task, project or summative format; they were small measures to ensure a system of check and balances before teaching could progress beyond a point of disengagement from the lesson by the students. There were a lot of changes that took place with regards to lesson planning because the conversations that developed from the observations and feedback had changed. Teachers shifted their mindset to include the instructional strategies in order to ensure that the students had access to curriculum.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this study, qualitative data were collected and analyzed in the form of pre and post surveys, interviews, focus groups, post-professional development evaluations, and post cycle reflections. The action research project explored effective professional development as it pertains to education reform implementation. A professional development model that addressed Common Core implementation assessed the adoption of school-wide instructional strategies within 5-week cycles of professional development, observations by leadership team members, teacher and student reflection, interviews, and focus groups. The purpose was to assist more students to achieve common core standards in reading, writing, and discussion in all content areas, close student skill gaps, and support teacher collaboration within departments and school-wide.

The contribution of this study with regards to previous research and addressing the gaps in literature surrounding effective professional development was to help readers define the elements of an effective professional development model that will help increase teacher quality and student achievement. This study was unique in that all departments participated in whole group professional development sessions to address the implementation of the instructional strategies; however, each department each implemented the strategy and made changes with regards to implementation based on the needs of their department. The ultimate contribution was creating a professional development model that was relevant for each department on campus so that sustainable change occurred. The goal of the action research project was to inform the school and the district on how to develop effective professional developments for teachers and inform schools on how to use data to improve their teaching practice and student learning during an era of reform.

In this final chapter, the implications of the study as they relate to the existing literature on effective professional development will be discussed as well as how the literature relates to the theoretical frameworks. Limitations of the study and recommendations for future research will also be discussed.

Discussion of Key Findings and Existing Research

Common Core Reform

Professional development in the era of Common Core required a major shift in 2014 as the nation sought to transition from individualized state standards to national standards that focused on literacy across the content areas as well as the transformation of teaching and learning (Marrongelle, et al., 2013). Professional development needed to take into account the content knowledge which teachers already possessed while bridging the gap between content and literacy. The transition to Common Core needed to be seamless and the need for professional development was heightened as states, districts, and schools looked to transform teacher planning, pedagogy, and student outcomes (Jenkins, S. & Agamba, JJ., 2013). The new standards created an anticipated anxiety of what implementation should look like and states knew that based on the mistakes made in the implementation of No Child Left Behind, that professional development had to be ongoing, collaborative, and reflective (Posnick-Goodwin, S., 2014).

The purpose of the study was to document the experiences, perceptions, and influence, if any, of the professional development model in the form of action research. The action research format consisted of four cycles of professional development for teachers and administrators with implementation through unit plans in all content areas. During the cycles, the teachers reflected on the process and measured student achievement via artifacts and formative assessments in

order to show that consistent implementation and not the reform alone will create the gains that Common Core is meant to produce (Jenkins & Agamba, 2013).

The Experiences of Teachers and Instructional Leadership Team Members

The first and second research question looked at the experiences of teachers and Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) members as they participated in the professional development model. The five themes that emerged as a result of their participation were time, communication, collaboration, accountability, and best practices. All five themes connected with the existing research throughout the qualitative data collection methods as both strengths and weaknesses of the model. Past researchers define what effective professional development should and must look like as educators across the nation moved to implement Common Core. Duration, form, and collaboration were the major characteristics of an effective professional development model according to the literature (Hunzicker, J., 2010; Putman et al., 2009; Guskey, T., 2009). Teachers and administrators indicated that the professional development model did not allow for enough time to collaborate with colleagues on how to implement the strategies prior to being observed. Collaboration allowed teachers the opportunities to engage with their colleagues and interact with the curriculum (Tournaki, et al., 2011). The teachers wanted more time to work with their departments in order to get the full benefit of the professional development cycle. Although the teachers broke into department groupings during the whole group professional development, the time allowed for professional development was not enough to establish meaningful dialogue with department colleagues. I feel this created the decline in confidence in using the strategies initially after they were presented to the teachers. Effective professional development promotes a great deal of collaboration that looks to improve teacher dialogue

centered on instructional conversations that promote student achievement and teacher efficacy (Poekert, P.E., 2012).

The time frame did create a sense of accountability school-wide and within departments to ensure that the strategies were being implemented. There was also a convergence of the themes in terms of sharing of best practices because a sense of accountability was also created when teachers were expected to share among colleagues in an equitable manner in order to build capacity of all staff.

The Perceptions of Teachers and Instructional Leadership Team Members as to their Beliefs on Necessary Components

The third research question looked at the perceptions of teachers and ILT members in terms of what they believed to be the necessary components of an effective professional development model. The six themes that emerged were delivery method, observation, feedback, reflection, scaffolding, and common planning time. The whole group professional development delivery method was a major point of contention among the staff and it is important to note that the format in which professional development is delivered is critical because research has shown that teachers are often drawn to professional development that shares best practices from colleagues rather than top down from administrators who are reciting research-based knowledge without necessarily having had implementation experience (Guskey, T., 2003). The trainer of the trainers model allows teachers to be respected for their existing content knowledge and pedagogy which in turn creates greater buy in overall (Richardson, V., 2003).

The professional development model created a dialogue between departments, within departments, and between the leadership team and teachers to implement the action research. Based on the qualitative data, the project had a positive impact on the school site because it

allowed for observations and feedback not only from the administrators but also from other teachers. Professional development in the form of action research allowed the administrators and teachers to work together to build a common focus for the school. When administrators and teachers work together to build an effective professional development model, the benefits of the relationship provide insight from both perspectives that decrease challenges and increase successes (Edwards, B. & Gammell, J., 2016).

The teachers felt comfortable with the implementation of the instructional strategies as the professional development model progressed and increased support was provided during the cycles. The action research created an unbiased environment that allowed for reflection and constructive feedback. The staff began to see the relevance of the professional delivery method and the benefit of the observation as they pertained to the implementation of the professional development cycle. The result became a transformation of habits and beliefs that begin to align espoused theories of teacher practice with theories in use (Harnett, J., 2012).

The teachers and administrators both expressed that each instructional strategy needed to be supported in subsequent professional development topics in order to allow a continuum of growth for teacher as leaders. The continuation of the professional development model is critical because time allows for properly planned professional developments, which in turn will drive focused observations and feedback. The professional development model must be ongoing and sustainable in order for teachers to continuously engage in the learning process (Steyn, 2005).

The Influence of the Professional Development Model on Teaching

The fourth research question examined the influence of the professional development model on teaching according to teachers and instructional leaders with regards to pedagogy, literacy across the content areas, and measuring student outcomes. The three themes that

emerged were increased use of reading, writing and discussion strategies in the classrooms, creating common rubrics and assessments, and lesson planning within departments. The teachers adjusted their lesson planning and departmental conversations based on the professional development content that was provided. The instructional pedagogy shifted to include literacy across all content areas in the context of reading, writing, and discussions. In addition, the teachers designed assessments that aligned with the instructional strategies and the assessments were used to inform next steps in terms of lesson planning, instruction, and professional conversations within departments.

Implications

Research shows that there are four major theoretical frameworks that relate to effective professional development and action research. The four frameworks are pedagogical content knowledge, adult learning theory, collaboration, and reflective practice. There was a definite need for consistent and effective professional development at the school site, but what that looked like neither the administration nor the teachers was completely sure. The professional development model allowed the staff to create a common focus that centered on the theoretical frameworks, which incorporated observations, feedback and evaluation.

Action Research

The conversations, the feedback from surveys, and the sharing of frustrations made the process meaningful because the data determined the success of the action research project. The push for Common Core implementation had all been based on theory and research and teachers were anxious to experience content application. According to Huang (2010), theory without practice is not theory but speculation. Whether the professional development cycle would work or not was merely speculation; however, as the staff came together to facilitate the action

research, a sense of cohesiveness was developed. Teachers appreciated the professional development model for its contribution to intra-departmental interactions, the collaboration with colleagues, and the feedback from the administrators and amongst the staff members.

Although many teachers were reluctant to embrace the professional development model, the process created a shift in leadership roles, instructional practice, and the dynamics of professional development delivery overall.

Overall, the action research project yielded positive results and it aligned closely with what was needed at the school in terms of an aligned professional development vision and establishing new habits of mind, which were key factors in the implementation of this project. I feel positive that the work that has been done thus far will continue and once I present the findings, hopefully that will inspire them to continue the work within all departments with fidelity. The feedback and learning curves should continue to guide the action research process. The ultimate goal was to fully immerse the teachers as practitioners (Huang, H.B., 2010) in the growth process of Common Core implementation. Figure 5.1 outlines the action research process with a focus on professional development methods that proved to be a good fit for the school and the teachers. The professional development model included program-level practices and characteristics that will help sustain results and develop indicators to measure degrees of change toward the desired results (Weisburd, C. & Sniad, T., 2006).

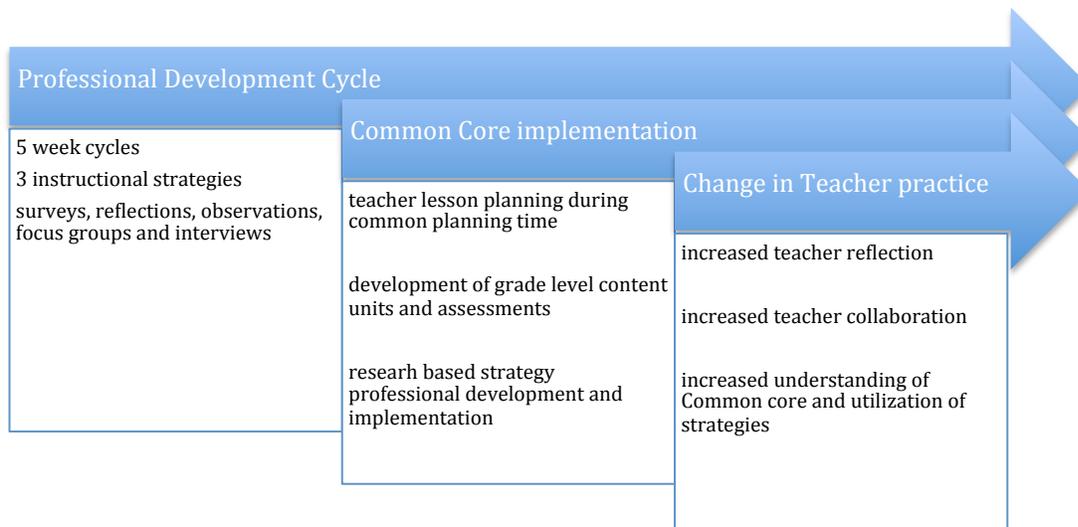


Figure 5.1 Action Research Theory of Action

Pedagogical Content Knowledge

Professional development strengthens teacher pedagogy because it allows teachers to align their content knowledge with research based instructional strategies (Michael Putman, et al., 2009). The professional development model allowed teachers to reflect on and change their existing knowledge and beliefs about their instructional practice. When teachers strengthen their content knowledge and pedagogical practices, teacher quality improves (Dash, de Kramer, O'Dwyer, Masters, & Russell, 2012) and when teachers engage in the action research process of professional development, common goals begin to align and a shift occurs. The model allowed for the alignment of the instructional standards with the content.

Adult Learning Theory

Teacher quality deals with teachers as learners and how through professional development, they can improve their instructional practices. When teachers switched roles from teacher to active learner their practice changed thus affecting teacher quality. Changes in quality of instruction and delivery occur when teachers change their attitudes about teaching (Chen, J.Q. &

McCray, J., 2012). Veteran and novice teachers learned from one another via observation and conversations. Teachers became learners throughout the entire process.

Collaboration

Effective professional development allows teachers to discuss, problem solve, share best practices and observe one another (Robinson, R. and Carrington, S., 2002; Steyn, G.M., 2005). Collaboration contributed toward the development of a positive school culture that was committed to change and the creation of a better learning environment for all students. Effective professional development provided teachers with the opportunity to discuss achievements, problems with delivery of new strategies, and feedback from the collaboration with other teachers.

Reflective Practice

Teachers' reflection was also a critical component of the model for student success and teacher success. Reflective thinking is the process where informed and logical decisions are made and the consequences of those decisions are assessed (Taggart, G. & Wilson, A., 2005; Fosnot, C. T., & Perry, R. S., 1996). The teachers felt empowered when they become reflective decision makers and investigated the teaching and learning process on an individual level and within their departments.

Limitations

Sample Selection

Teacher participation in the professional development model was partly voluntary and partly involuntary. The teachers were required to participate in the monthly whole group professional development sessions as part the district required professional development hours; however, not all teachers participated in giving feedback from the professional development, nor

did they all participate in the pre and post survey. The post-professional development evaluations were administered more than once at the conclusion of each of the four sessions to ensure that a large percentage of teachers completed the evaluations. The variation in data from the pre and post survey and the post professional development evaluation created skewed results when it came to the quantitative analysis.

Sample Size and Characteristics

It is important to note that generalizability of the findings is limited due to the skewed numbers of participation at the conclusion of each professional development cycle. The variety in sample sizes of the pre and post survey respondents as well as the post-professional development reflections respondents made it difficult to quantitatively compare the results of the pre and post survey data as planned. It is also important to note that not all school populations mirror the teacher population of the selected sample. Half of the teachers had been teaching more than 15 years and half had been teaching less than 15 years. Therefore to generalize the study to a larger population would be inappropriate.

Support of the Action Research Process

I think in order for the action research process to have been effective, there needed to be a culture of mutually collaborative respect for what occurs at the school site and what the district expected to occur. Administrators were trying to create a sacred time for professional development and common planning while being told to implement technology roll outs, operational mandates, and pull staff for off campus impromptu meetings. When you are dealing with a professional development model that operates on a structured time frame, inconsistency can leave staff deflated thus creating learners who are reluctant to implement new practices for fear that they will be eliminated the following year or even the next month.

Recommendations

Because the goal of action research in terms of professional development is to create a community of practice (Harnett, J., 2012), effective professional development must begin with implementation of the model at a single site then expand to a larger scale of program building on what was learned. According to research, the gaps in determining whether effective model of professional development exist are based on the need to evaluate multiple professional development programs at multiple sites. It is important to address the issue of professional development in the form of action research in order to identify effective and ineffective components as the process occurs using multiple data sources (Hill, H., Beiseigel, M., and Jacob, R., 2013).

This study has added to the extant literature in regards to professional development because it includes the experiences and perspectives of the teachers and instructional leadership team as they participated in action research as opposed to documenting their stories or cases concluding the action research or professional development. Much of the research has focused on what is needed for common core implementation based on past research that documents the components of an effective professional development. This study also addressed the literature gaps with regards to Common Core and professional development because the study focused on research based strategies that align with the focus of Common Core implementation. The specific reading, writing, and discussion strategies were used to align the professional development model with Common Core implementation as the teachers planned, implemented, and reviewed the model after each cycle; however, a study is necessary that includes professional development that addresses tiered implementation of the strategies as it pertains to expertise and previous levels of implementation. This will allow for a more personalized professional development model that

differentiates implementation according to the specific skills, motivations, and attitudes of teachers. A future study should also investigate the motivational aspects of teachers with regards to participation in the professional development model and completing evaluations, implementing the strategies within their classrooms, and being reflective about the process.

The next steps for the professional development model in terms of informing leadership and improving practice are to have frequent checks with departments regarding cycle progress and troubleshooting during cycles to ensure successful implementation of professional development by content area, have departments lead some of the professional developments in order to share best practices and showcase the strategies within specific content areas, adjust all professional development evaluations to reflect intended expectations and outcomes of professional development cycle, and create student focus groups to get a student perspective based on student conversation regarding the process.

Another possible change to the model would be to divide the professional development into content area or conduct professional development within the department meetings to be sure that each department can see the relevance of the instructional strategies to their content, and alter the surveys and evaluations or the research questions so that they have a closer alignment to one another.

In terms of Common Core implementation, the professional development model should shift its focus to some of the goals teachers set for their students, i.e.: academic resiliency, using academic language, incorporating technology into the common core based lessons, and transitions within the lesson. The model should give teachers and students a voice as they reflect on the areas of reading, writing, and discussion to further inform next steps regarding instruction, intervention, and assessments.

Lastly, the school needs to create, adapt, or adopt a set of common expectations for what Common Core aligned instructional strategies and pedagogy looks like in the respective content areas. The model should begin with an in depth analysis of the standards, the necessary instructional shifts and rubrics. The departments need extensive training on how to design formative and summative assessments that places instruction and actionable data for teachers at the core of the model. Teachers must be trained on how to translate qualitative and quantitative data into effective instruction that is aligned to the goals of Common Core.

These recommendations and findings will be disseminated to the school site through a meeting with administrators and the instructional leadership team. I will also present the recommendations to the Local District Superintendent, the Instructional Director of the school as well as the Chief Academic Officer for the Division of Instruction. The findings are meant to assist the school site in planning for the professional development model for the 2016-2017 school year and to assist the district in supporting schools to develop sustainable models for professional development where effective instructional leadership teams are developed to create teacher leaders and a culture of collaboration through continuous action research.

Conclusion

The project started off responding to the problem of lack of a professional development model that was effective and poor implementation of reform via professional development. Although I feel the problem was not completely solved thus far, the implementation of the professional development model through the action research process is a start in a positive direction to implementing Common Core based instructional strategies that will develop teacher practice and increase student achievement.

When teachers hone their craft through professional development, learning occurs. The professional development model allowed teachers to engage in continuous learning, and develop positive relationships with colleagues and the leadership team. The goal of the professional development model was to build capacity, work collaboratively, and plan with the end in mind. The professional development model addressed the lack of observation, feedback and collaboration that the school needed in order to build capacity.

APPENDIX A

2015-2016

Professional Development Plan

Overview

Collaborative professional development aligned to student learning and Common Core State Standards that prepares, trains, and recruits high-quality teachers, principals, paraprofessionals, and other staff.

Objectives

Establish 5-week Professional Development cycles that transform teaching and learning so that we prepare all youth to be college and workforce ready.

Plan.Do.Review

- ✦ Incorporate the 21st century skills: Collaboration, Communication, Critical Thinking and Creativity
- ✦ Teach high quality rigorous lessons to support the Common Core State Standards

Topics

August 25

September 15

Discussion and Student Collaboration

September 22

October 6

Reading Strategies

Low Stakes, High Stakes Writing

October 20

November 3

Low Stakes, High Stakes Writing

December 1, 15

Department Data, Analysis

Next Steps for Second Semester, Whole School Data

***PD topics are subject to change*

Focus: Common Core Implementation

Plan.Do.Review

TGDC Focus Standards:

1. 1.d.1- Standards Based Learning Activities
2. 2.b.2-Expectations for Learning and Achievement
3. 3.a.4 – Use of Academic Language
4. 3.b.1/2-Quality and Purpose of Questions/Discussion Techniques and Student Participation
5. 5.a.2-Use of Reflection to Inform Future Instruction

PD Presenters:

We will be seeking out different PLCs to present the PD topics.

APPENDIX B

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FEEDBACK TOOL- FOR EDUCATORS PRE and POST SURVEY

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. The Instructional Leadership Team is administering this survey to better understand how teachers can best be supported during the transition to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) through effective Professional Development. The survey is approximately 30 minutes in length. Your responses are completely confidential.

Your feedback is greatly appreciated!

Background Information

1. Please select the grade level(s) that you currently teach. (Check all that apply)

- Grade 6
- Grade 7
- Grade 8

2. In which content areas do you currently teach? (Check all that apply)

- All areas/general education
- English Language Arts/Literacy
- Math
- Science
- Social Studies
- Special Education
- English Language Learners (ELL)
- Other: _____

3. What best describes the years you have been teaching?

- 1-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- 21-25
- Over 25

4. What is the highest degree that you have obtained?

- Bachelors
- Masters
- Doctorate
- Other

5. Have you read the Common Core State Standards that relate to your grade and subject area? Y/N

Professional Development Baseline

6. The professional development in which I have participated was relevant to my content.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

7. The professional development in which I have participated helped me to implement CCSS in my classroom.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

8. I feel whole group professional development is beneficial to learning new strategies and content.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

9. I feel department specific professional development is beneficial to learning new strategies and content.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

10. After a professional development, my department creates an action plan to implement the strategy.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

11. After a professional development, I implement the strategy in my classroom.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

12. I receive feedback from administrators and/or instructional coaches regarding my instructional practices based on observations.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

13. Department meetings that I attend are collaborative and beneficial to professional growth.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

14. There is ample time to implement the strategy or content learned after a professional development session.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

15. I am reflective on my teaching practices after implementing a new strategy or content to my students.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

APPENDIX C

Teacher Interview/Focus Group Protocol

1. What do you feel are the strengths of the professional development model?
2. What do you feel are the weaknesses of the professional development model?
3. What changes do you feel can be made to the professional development model?
4. What elements of the professional development model were the most beneficial to you as a teacher? Why?
5. As the cycle progressed, what changes did you make with regards to lesson planning, lesson delivery, reflection, and/or class environment?
6. How beneficial were the weekly department meetings during each cycle?
7. How beneficial were the professional development sessions? Were some topics more helpful than others?
8. Do you feel time was a factor, positive or negative, in the implementation of the professional development model? Explain.
9. How did the post cycle reflections help you as a teacher to make adjustments during the cycle?
10. As you look toward second semester, what do you perceive are the immediate needs of the school in terms of professional development and Common Core implementation?

APPENDIX D

Administrator Interview/Focus Group Protocol

1. What do you feel are the strengths of the professional development model?
2. What do you feel are the weaknesses of the professional development model?
3. What changes do you feel can be made to the professional development model?
4. What elements of the professional development model were the most beneficial to you as an administrator? Why?
5. As the cycle progressed, what changes did see being made with regards to lesson planning, lesson delivery, reflection, and/or class environment
6. How beneficial were the weekly department meetings during each cycle?
7. How beneficial were the professional development sessions? Were some topics more helpful than others?
8. Do you feel time was a factor, positive or negative, in the implementation of the professional development model? Explain.
9. After each cycle, how did your level of support change to teachers?
10. As you look toward second semester, what do you perceive are the immediate needs of the school in terms of professional development and Common Core implementation?

APPENDIX E

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT EVALUATION

School: _____	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Topic: _____					
Date: _____					

Content

1. The objectives for today's session were clearly stated.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
2. Today's session was aligned to its stated objectives.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
3. Today's session was useful and practical.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
4. Today's session advanced the development of my content knowledge.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Process

5. Today's activities (presentations, scenarios, group exercises, etc.) increased my capacity to use data to improve my practice.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
6. The facilitators of today's session effectively modeled appropriate instructional strategies.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
7. The facilitators of today's session incorporated our experiences into today's activities (presentations, scenarios, group exercises, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
8. Time was allocated effectively today to deepen my understanding of the presented material.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Context

9. There were opportunities during today's session to collaborate on shared activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
10. Today's activities (presentations, scenarios, group exercises, etc.) were relevant for my classroom-related needs.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Comments

What things did you learn through today's professional development that was unexpected? Why?
As a result of today's session, what will you do differently in the future? Why?

APPENDIX F

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CYCLE REFLECTION

Unit Title/Cycle #: _____ **Date:** _____

Department Name _____

Instructions: Please rate each item from “Poor” to “Excellent”
If the statement is not applicable, leave it blank.

Poor

Excellent

1. Were the objectives of the cycle made clear?	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]
2. How effective was the support of the instructional leadership team?	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]
3. How effective were the professional developments in helping to implement the selected strategy?	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]
4. Were the delivery methods conducive to learning?	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]
5. Were your questions and concerns addressed?	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]
6. How useful will these ideas and skills be in improving student learning?	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]
7. How would you rate the overall value of this PD model?	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]

8. What were the best aspects of this professional development cycle?

9. What could be done to improve the next cycle?

10. For future sessions, what professional development topics would be most helpful in performing your job?

APPENDIX G

August 1, 2015

Dear <Insert Participant Name>

As a doctoral student at the University of California, Los Angeles, I am conducting an action research project to understand the perspectives of teachers and administrators on the implementation of Common Core through a professional development model. This is the sole purpose of the study. The results should be of interest and value to all teachers, administrators, coordinators, and those who use professional development as a means to contribute to school collaboration and student achievement.

I am inviting you to participate in the research by participating in a school wide professional development model that will consist of four 5-week cycles. The cycles will include the professional development sessions and department meetings that take place each Tuesday; providing feedback regarding those professional development sessions; providing reflective feedback after each cycle; participating in lesson observations twice a cycle; completing a pre and post survey regarding professional development experiences and perceptions; participate in an oral interview; and participate in a focus group.

Your experiences and ideas are important for those who plan and lead professional development and for overall school improvement. I also invite you to participate in a 45-minute interview to answer interview questions that will be audiotaped, as well as a 60-minute focus group that will be audiotaped. I will keep your identity and the identity of your school confidential. I intend to use a pseudonym to conceal your identity.

If you agree to participate, I will provide you with copy of the transcript of the interview. This will give you the opportunity to clarify your responses. On completion of the study, I will share a summary of the findings with you.

You may contact me at msbio99@gmail.com for further clarification or should you have any concerns about my study. If you agree to participate in the study, I will send you a consent form to sign and return via mail or email. Upon receiving your signed letter, I will contact you to schedule an interview.

Thank you in advance for agreeing to participate in this study.

Adaina Brown

APPENDIX H

University of California, Los Angeles

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Policy to Practice: The Perspectives of Teachers and Administrators on the Implementation of Common Core Utilizing Action Research to Design a Professional Development Model.

Adaina Brown, under the faculty sponsorship of Professors Dr. Tucker and Dr. Cooper from the Department of Education and Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) are conducting a research study.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a teacher, coordinator or administrator at the LAUSD research site. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

Why is this study being done?

The purpose of this study is to address the issue of inadequate professional development as it pertains to implementation of new reform and in this context, CCSS implementation. The action research project will address the issue through the implementation of a professional development model whose foci are teacher led professional development, teacher reflections, lesson observations, and departmental collaboration. There are four 5-week cycles where teachers and administrators participate in the model and use the data at the end of each cycle to refine the professional development model. The goal of this action research project is gain feedback from teacher and administrator experience as they participate in the cycle and use the feedback to create a model that schools can use to plan effective professional development. The secondary goal is to look at the effects of the professional development model in an attempt to change teacher practice and perceptions on teaching reading, writing, discussion in their content area.

What will happen if I take part in this research study?

As part of the action research project, the research will ask you to do the following:

- Participate in a 30-minute pre and post online anonymous survey. Some questions that you may be asked in the survey are “how strongly you agree or disagree that the professional development you have participated in is relevant to your content” or “how strongly you agree or disagree that there is ample time to implement the strategy or content learned after a professional development session”.
- Be observed twice a month or per cycle following professional development session to engage in reflective conversation with department and ILT members
- Complete post-professional development reflections to provide feedback regarding the professional development session
- Complete post cycle reflections to provide feedback regarding the professional development model and the cycle process

If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following:

- Participate in one 45-minute interview during non-work hours at your selected site.
- Answer interview questions regarding your experience and perception as a teacher, coordinator, or administrator. For example, you may be asked “What do you feel are the strengths of the professional development model?” or “What do you feel are the weaknesses of the professional development model?”
- You will be asked for permission to have the interview audio recorded.
- Participants will be asked to volunteer to participate in one follow-up focus group. Some questions that may be asked in the focus group are “What elements of the professional development model were the most beneficial to you as a teacher/administrator? Why?” or “As the cycle progressed, what changes did you make with regards to lesson planning, lesson delivery, reflection, and/or class environment?”
- The surveys, interviews, and focus groups are completely voluntary and will take place during non paid time.

How long will I be in the research study?

Participation will take a total of 45 minutes for the interview and if you choose to participate in the follow up focus group, participants would need to meet on one occasion for 60 minutes each at a central location.

Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?

- There are no anticipated risks or discomforts.

Are there any potential benefits if I participate?

By participating in the study, you will be offered a hard copy and electronic copy of the findings and a Professional Development Handbook that will be created as a result of this research.

The results of the research may improve professional development for teachers as they implement new policies and create a universal tool that may help in changing teacher practice and perceptions with regards to implementing new reform.

Will I be paid for participating?

- You will receive a small gift card (\$10) and compensated for any time volunteered before school or after school on behalf of the school.

Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?

- Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law.

- Confidentiality will be maintained by means of pseudonyms and your real name and work site will not be reported with the data.
- All focus group participants will be asked to keep what is said during the group session between the participants only. However, complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?

- You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time.
- Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you, and no loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled.
- You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.
- You may refuse to have the interview audio recorded.

Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?

- **The research team:**

If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can talk to the one of the researchers. Please contact:

Adaina Brown, Doctoral Candidate, Principal Investigator
 UCLA Department of Education and Information Studies
 Educational Leadership Program
 Phone: (310) 493-0137 Email: msbio99@gmail.com

Dr. Eugene Tucker, Professor, Faculty Advisor
 UCLA, Graduate School of Education and Information Studies
 Educational Leadership Program
 Phone: (310) 206-1879 Email: tucker@ucla.edu

- **UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP):**

If you have questions about your rights while taking part in this study, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers about the study, please call the OHRPP at (310) 825-7122 or write to:

UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program
 11000 Kinross Avenue, Suite 211, Box 951694
 Los Angeles, CA 90095-1694

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT

Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

I give permission to the researcher to audio record the interview. I understand that the recording and any transcription of the interview will be kept confidential and stored in a locked safe. _____

Initial

SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT

Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Contact Number

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

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