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Professional Development to Enhance Instructional Leadership and Practice of Central Office Administrators

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2016

Abstract

Professional Development to Enhance Instructional Leadership and Practice of

Central Office Administrators

by

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M. Ed., Lehigh University, 1990

BS, Kutztown University, 1987

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

June 2016

Abstract

Decades of research and practice suggest that educational administrators need to experience opportunities for professional development and continuous learning. This project study addressed the problem regarding the lack of a formal or systemic plan for professional development of central office administrators in a large suburban school district in northeastern United States. Supported by Lave and Wenger's communities of practice model and the work of Bandura in social learning theory, the research question investigated the ways in which central office administrators experienced continuous learning and professional development opportunities and the perceptions regarding the effectiveness of those practices as a vehicle for enhancing their knowledge of instructional leadership and practice. A descriptive qualitative case study design using the purposeful sampling of 18 central office administrators was used to collect data via an open-ended survey, plan analysis, and document reviews that were coded and analyzed for common themes. Themes that emerged revealed participants thought that collaborative and reflective practices were important to continuous learning and professional development and necessary to enhance knowledge of instructional leadership and practice. Study findings supported the need for increased time and an identified structure for professional development opportunities as well as an improved culture of learning for the district's central office administrative team. Providing a structure for more systemic professional development for central office administrators may lead to more quality instruction and leadership practice, thus influencing student learning in this district as an aspect of positive social change.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated first and foremost to my family...

- My husband, Arden McCue, for believing in me and understanding the sacrifice of time in this journey;
- My parents, Frank and Lucy Reinhard, for instilling in me the values of hard work and service to others;
- My sisters, who are constant reminders of the need to live each day to the fullest and make the greatest impact possible; and
- Lastly, my nieces and nephews, who are the future and for whom this work is so important.

You have all influenced my life in immeasurable ways and I am forever grateful to have you as family.

Secondly, this work is dedicated to all in the field of education who have the opportunity every day to influence the lives of others through their work. Their impact on the future is endless.

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

Demands for increased accountability for student achievement have created the need for greater collaborative and reflective practices among teachers, building principals, and central office administrators. Research supports the creation of professional learning communities as collaborative and reflective vehicles for growth and professional development for teachers (DuFour & DuFour, 2006); however, little research points to the application of this same ideal for those in leadership positions. The principal and district administrators who lead teachers in developing collaborative and reflective environments could enhance this concept and be at the center of the professional learning community movement. Mullen and Hutingger (2008) supported the involvement of principals and district administrators, suggesting that those in leadership positions foster increased teacher learning and improved student achievement by providing opportunities and resources for continuous learning and professional development. Often, however, those in leadership positions lack knowledge and experience with leading professional learning communities as well as with establishing opportunities for their own professional growth and development (Schachter, 2013).

In this qualitative project study, I explored the ways in which central office administrators in a large suburban school district experienced opportunities for continuous learning and professional development in order to enhance knowledge of effective instructional leadership and practice. Important to the study was research that suggested that effective leadership and practice at the central office level can lead to

informed support at the school level and thus, can have a positive impact on student achievement (Marzano & Waters, 2009). The study examined the district's comprehensive plan, leadership-level documents, and responses from an open-ended survey. Data collected and analyzed across sources examined the ways in which district level administrators experienced opportunities for continuous learning and professional development and the perceptions regarding the effectiveness of those practices as a vehicle for enhancing their knowledge of instructional leadership and practice.

Definition of the Problem

The study focused on a large suburban school district that encompasses 42 square miles and more than 100,000 residents within its boundaries in southeastern Pennsylvania (SESD, 2011). For the purposes of this project study, the pseudonym of Southeastern School District refers to the district of study. Students attending the district's 18 schools number 12,752 (SESD, 2011). According to the Southeastern School District, the organizational structure for the K-12 school system includes:

- 13 elementary schools that range in size from 350 to 620 students and serve Grades K through 6.
- Three middle schools with populations ranging from 790 to 1230 that serves students in Grades 7 through 9.
- One high school that provides programming for 3,200 students in Grades 10 through 12.
- One alternative education school that provides support to 70 students in Grades 7 through 12.

The district employs over 2,100 professional and support staff (SESD, 2011). Regular and special education teachers and assistants, guidance counselors, psychologists, speech therapists, behavior specialists, nurses, and home and school visitors, as well as an administrative team of 54 members are included in those members considered professional staff (SESD, 2011). Support staff employees number slightly over 1,000 and include the service areas of facilities and physical plant management, transportation, business and financial management, human resources, technology development, school and community engagement, extended school care, and school nutrition services (SESD, 2011).

Within the Southeastern School District, continuous learning and professional development have not been systematically nurtured or supported for its administrative team or members in central office positions of leadership. At a time in education when federal legislation (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002) mandates the highest levels of accountability for students and professional performance, the district lacks a formal and systemic plan for central office administrators to experience professional development and opportunities for continuous learning in regards to enhancing their knowledge of effective instructional leadership and practice (Southeastern SD Strategic Plan, 2008, 2011). Instructional departments within central office and school buildings within the district often function as separate entities, focusing on the discrete leadership and management functions of their areas rather than the coordinated and collaborative efforts of the district as a whole. As a result, administrators in the district lack a common vision and struggle with supporting each other as well as staff and students in implementing the

best instructional practices for increased student achievement (Administrative Cabinet Members, personal communications, 2011). For these reasons, the problem addressed in the project study is the lack of a formal or systemic plan for central office administrators to experience professional development and continuous learning focused on increasing knowledge of instructional leadership and practice.

Bambrick-Santoyo (2012) posited the need for school systems to revise the way they view and support school leadership in order to operate with an instructional vision that is clear and focused on the growth of the organization. Maxwell (2010) and Goldring, et al. (2009), suggested that the role of the principal and central office administrators shift from managing operations to facilitating instruction in order to respond to the call for increased accountability and greater need for enhanced instructional knowledge. In order to make this shift, leaders must be able to delegate the work that is operational in nature and receive coaching and continued support in instructional leadership (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012). While necessary and important, these practices have not been the focus or the norm for central office administrators in the Southeastern School District or in the historical view of educational leadership (Honig, 2012).

According to David (2009), leaders can derive substantial benefit from meeting with their peers in order to foster collaboration and reflection in much the same way as has been planned and proven beneficial for teachers (DuFour & DuFour, 2006). In so doing, leaders enhance their knowledge and improve their practice regarding effective instruction. Factors that influence the learning of district administrators and that focus on

communities of practice (Wenger, 2006) are central to creating a system's approach to becoming a learning organization in which effective instructional practice and student achievement are the focus. Administrative leaders at the building and central office levels in this district have expressed concern for current practice and lack of professional development opportunities as well as interest in developing a culture of collaboration and reflection in order to create effective and supportive instructional leadership in their departments and schools (Superintendent, Cabinet Members, Building and District-level Leaders, personal communications, 2011).

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

As instructional leaders, principals and district administrators are responsible for the culture and environment in which all learning takes place. School leaders indirectly influence the learning and achievement of students through the work of teachers (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Walhstrom, 2004). Increases in student achievement have been positively linked to the effective operation of schools, to their instructional programs and practices, and to the quality of leadership present in the school and at the district level (Chrisman, 2005). Through the successful leadership behaviors of direction setting, developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the instructional program, district leaders directly and indirectly influence practices at the school level and have the potential to significantly affect the achievement of students (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). Therefore, in accepting responsibility for their influence in the learning process, district and building level leaders must be knowledgeable of leadership

behaviors and practices that contribute to the effectiveness of teachers and the achievement of students.

When those in leadership positions are unclear as to how to best support those in teaching positions, opportunities to impact programming and increase student achievement can be lost (Chrisman, 2005). Collaborative and reflective practices, as well as job-embedded professional development opportunities, targeted to increase school district leaders' knowledge of effective instructional practice seem to hold promise for positively affecting classroom practice and ultimately increasing student achievement (Guskey & Yoon, 2009). As instructional leaders, central office administrators hold the ultimate responsibility for the educational system and its practices and as a result, should value processes that include continuous learning and professional development for themselves and others within the system.

The Southeastern School District (SSD) conducts yearly surveys of all constituents in order to identify strengths and weaknesses in practices that are associated with the success of the organization. In themed sections and through specific prompts, a majority of those surveyed identified concerns attributed to aspects of leadership and professional learning within the organization. As reported, 68% of district administrators indicated concerns for effective leadership, visibility and support, communications, and a focus on professional learning community time as it relates to instructional practice and student achievement (SSD, 2011). Most importantly, only 62% of administrators felt they had the knowledge needed to provide appropriate programs for special education students (SSD, 2011). The data provided within the surveys and the absence of a district-wide goal

and systemic process for providing professional development and continuous learning opportunities for the District's administrative staff (SSD Strategic Plan, 2011) evidences the local problem and serves as the basis of need for this project study.

The purpose of this qualitative project study was to explore the ways in which central office administrators experienced opportunities for continuous learning and professional development in order to enhance their knowledge of effective instructional leadership and practice. This study investigated the ways in which district level administrators experienced opportunities for continuous learning and professional development and their perceptions regarding the effectiveness of those practices as a vehicle for enhancing their knowledge of instructional leadership and practice.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

Discussions of the importance of management and leadership have been the focus of debates for years and most recently, both ideals are considered to be essential elements for successful learning communities in environments characterized by a common vision, shared leadership, collaboration and team learning, and systems thinking (Bolman & Deal, 1994; Leithwood, 1992; Senge, et al., 1990). Cunningham and Cordeiro (2003) expressed their realization that administrators and leaders of today need to be able to function successfully in balancing the roles of both leader and manager in order for schools to run effectively and achieve the goal of producing high achieving students. Historically, educational leadership was solely managerial in nature with administrators trained in top-down decision-making processes and managerial operations at the school and district levels (Doyle, 2004). Over time and in response to the effective schools

literature, the role of educational administrators began to shift from that of operational managers to instructional leaders whose responsibilities grew to include establishing and monitoring high expectations for student achievement (Edmonds, 1979; Hallinger and Murphy, 1986). As a result, administrators must understand the new dimensions of their responsibilities and be knowledgeable in both the leadership and manager roles assumed by their positions.

Effective instructional leaders have recognized the need for professional development opportunities and have spoken consistently about developing their knowledge of curriculum and instruction in order to improve teaching and learning (Grigsby, Schumacker, Decman, & Simieou, 2010; King, 2002). School districts have only recently begun to investigate reform efforts to assist administrators in understanding their role as instructional leaders with the important function of improving the teaching and learning process for students and staff in schools (Honig, 2012). Literature is limited and practice has only begun, but researchers in the field are focusing their attention on elements of instructional leadership and the ways in which district leaders are experiencing opportunities for professional learning and growth in order to increase their knowledge of instructional practice (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012; Doyle, 2004; Honig, 2012; Lambert, 2005;). As an extension of the literature, the purpose of this study was to investigate the ways in which district level administrators experience opportunities for continuous learning and professional development and their perceptions regarding the effectiveness of those practices as a vehicle for enhancing their knowledge of instructional leadership and practice.

Definitions

For purposes of understanding within the literature review and comprehensively within the study, the following terms and definitions apply:

Collaborative practices. Collaborative practices in this study reference “shared school governance, which encourages shared vision, broad participation, and shared accountability for learning; collaborative decisions focusing on academic improvement; and broad participation in efforts to evaluate the school’s academic development” (Heck & Hallinger, 2010, p. 237-238).

Community of Practice. A community of practice is a “set of relations among persons, activity, and world over time and in relation with each other” (Lave & Wenger, 1998, p. 98).

Instructional leadership. Instructional leadership refers to the process of using one’s knowledge, skills, and abilities to improve teaching and learning by supporting what and how students are taught as well as what they learn (Bottoms & O’Neill, 2001; Grigsby, Schumacher, Decman, & Simieou, 2010; King, 2002; Schellard, 2003).

Professional learning and development. Professional learning and development refers to the process of acquiring new knowledge and skills in order to improve the teaching and learning process in classrooms for teachers and students (Spillane, Healey, & Parise, 2009).

Professional learning community. DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker (2006) define a professional learning community (PLC) as “educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve” (p. 14). PLCs function with a belief system that

proposes continuous, job-embedded learning for educators as being the resource to improving learning for students.

Reflective practice. Reflective practice refers to the act of thinking about one's own work, the work of colleagues, and/or the school and its context in regards to a primary task (James, Dunning, Connolly, & Elliot, 2007). In addition, reflective practice also means the "ability to frame and reframe the practice setting, to develop and respond to this framing through action so that the practitioner's wisdom-in-action is enhanced and ...articulation or professional knowledge is encouraged" (Loughran, 2002, p. 42).

Reflective thinking. Reflective thinking or meta-cognition is an active process of thinking and monitoring one's own learning process that results in a change in conceptual understanding (Singh, Hawkins, & Whymark, 2007).

Systemic. Systemic in this study refers to that which occurs in all aspects, departments, and/or levels within the organization and remains specifically tied to a shared vision for learning (Senge, et al., 2000; Thornton, Shepperson, Canavero, 2007).

Significance

As shared previously, improvement in student achievement has been positively linked to the effective operation of schools, to their instructional programs and practices, and to the quality of leadership present in the school and at the district level (Chrisman, 2005). In response to increased accountability, building and district leaders may need to shift their focus from managerial tasks and operations to those involving instructional leadership (Goldring et al., 2009; Maxwell, 2010) and the ability to support the process of teaching and learning in the classroom. In order to support changes in instructional

programs and practices at the school level, building and district leaders will need to demonstrate understanding for what is needed and possess the required pedagogy and content knowledge (Lambert, 2005). Where and how they receive this new and ongoing knowledge defines the significance of the problem at the local level as well as in the larger context for all leaders in the field of education. The need for districts to shift from traditional forms of professional development to a culture of ongoing learning that is systemic in nature and focused on the needs of individuals is important to increasing the knowledge of administrators as well as ensuring the success of students (McLester, 2012). Establishing a culture of continuous learning customized to the individual is a practice that is in place for students but not considered for adults (McLester, 2012). Investigating the ways in which collaborative and reflective practices may serve to customize learning for administrators and enhance their knowledge of instructional leadership and practice speaks to the significance of this study and proposes a model of systemic change.

Guiding/Research Question

While studies have been conducted to examine continuous learning through collaborative and reflective practices in education, few have explored these practices in conjunction with the professional learning and development of building and district level administrators in regard to enhancing their knowledge of effective instructional leadership and practice. While limited evidence exists for those in positions of building level leadership and the ways principals influence teachers and instructional practice (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012), additional study in the area of continuous learning and

professional development opportunities for central and district office administrators is needed. Connecting adult and social learning theories to the foundation for collaborative and reflective practices, Vitcov and Bloom (2011) asserted that school leaders need ongoing support and instructional coaching in much the same way as teachers. Honig (2012) supported this assertion through a comparative, qualitative case study analysis that identified key practices for central office administrators and principals to strengthen their knowledge of instructional leadership. In considering the gap in the literature and practice as demonstrated through the literature review, the intent of this study was to explore the ways in which professional development and central office administrators experienced continuous learning opportunities in order to enhance their knowledge of effective instructional leadership and practice.

A qualitative case study design was employed to explore data regarding continuous learning opportunities and professional development among district-level administrators. The following question served to guide the research.

Research Question : In what ways do central office administrators experience professional development and continuous learning opportunities in order to enhance their knowledge of instructional leadership and practice within the district and what are their perceptions regarding the effectiveness of those practices?

Review of the Literature

The purpose of this qualitative project study was to explore the ways in which central office administrators experience opportunities for continuous learning and professional development in order to enhance their knowledge of effective instructional

leadership and practice. To better understand the problem and question in study as they relate to current and historical information (Creswell, 2012), a comprehensive literature review was conducted. I summarized information and presented through the theoretical framework of social learning and communities of practice as linked to content topics of instructional leadership, collaborative and reflective practices, and professional learning and development.

The constructivist view and specifically, that of social learning theory in conjunction with the communities of practice model, provide the theoretical framework for this study and support for the need for collaborative and reflective practices among educational administrators. Today's society finds teachers and district administrative leaders in an era of unprecedented accountability where the importance of educating as well as learning from others needs to be valued as a means to professional growth and development as well as enhanced instructional knowledge (McLester, 2012). To this end, administrators have been encouraged to create opportunities to work together in focusing their energies on the benefits of a collegial community that is rooted in collaborative and reflective practice for the purposes of continuous learning (David, 2009). For these reasons, social learning theory and the communities of practice Model serve as the theoretical framework and interpretive lens for the topics of instructional leadership, collaborative and reflective practices for instructional leadership, and professional development within the literature review.

The review of literature resulted from peer-reviewed journals and research sources from Academic Search, EBSCO, ERIC, ProQuest, and Sage databases as found

through the Walden University Library. Key words, terms, and phrases used were: *continuous learning, professional development, leadership, central and district office leadership, collaboration and collaborative practice, reflection and reflective practice, social learning, learning communities, and communities of practice.*

Social Learning Theory and Communities of Practice

Social learning theory supposes that people learn from each other through processes of observation, imitation, and modeling (Bandura, 1977). In this light, social learning is viewed as a reciprocal process and thus, creates avenues of learning among participating members while at the same time provides opportunities to spark new learning and higher levels of participation for those involved in the process. Within this community of learners, purpose and understanding develop as well as the establishment of social norms for the relationships that form among members (Lave & Wenger, 1998). As a close tie to and at times a process of social learning, communities of practice form. According to Wenger (2006), “Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact” (p. 2). Thus, social learning theory and the communities of practice model demonstrate similarity in the call for interaction among members and the shared experiences for those engaged in learning.

Research supports principles of collaborative learning and community building as the foundation for promoting innovation and problem solving as well as facilitating the development of new knowledge within a group (Bransford & Vye, 2008). Through a meta-analysis regarding Schools for Thought (SFT) research in which school district

leadership was viewed through the lenses of sociocultural and organizational learning theory, three different programs were reviewed (Bransford & Vye, 2008). Professional development of teachers and leaders was found to be instrumental in collaborative knowledge building and problem solving that enhanced instructional practices (Bransford & Vye, 2008). Central office administrators were key collaborators in the model, which stressed the importance of systems thinking and learning organizations (Senge et al., 2000) to promote and enact change.

Through research involving communities of practice, departmental and principal leadership surfaced as important factors to affect teachers' professional beliefs and instructional skills when provided with opportunities to learn from one another (Printy, 2008). In the study, researchers conducted a cross-sectional analysis using the teacher data file from the second follow-up to the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 as provided by the National Center for Education Statistics in 1994. Beginning with a sample size of 5,657 teachers and resulting in 2,718 as eligible participants, perception surveys were administered and transformed into probabilities using the Rasch Model (Anderson, 1973). Attitudes or behaviors as represented and summarized into findings suggested productive community memberships provide opportunities for teachers to enhance their beliefs and skills. Equally important in the analysis was the factor that administrative leadership determined the quality of teachers' participation in communities of practice (Printy, 2008). Thus, communities of practice provide the opportunity to enhance educators' knowledge, beliefs, and practice.

Due to leaders' limited understanding of some content areas, communities of practice among leadership differ from teachers' communities of practice in specific subject areas (Cobb, McClain, Lamberg, & Dean, 2003). Through semistructured interviews and surveys within a snowballing methodology over a 2-year period, triangulated teacher and administrator data demonstrated the interconnections between the various communities of practice within a school or district. The Cobb et al. (2003) study suggested that instructional practices were a direct result of the orientation of different communities and the activities of their members.

As a result of the limitation of subject matter knowledge experienced among educational leaders, a new construct of leadership content knowledge was introduced and was found to demonstrate how leaders' knowledge of subject matter impacted and interacted with their knowledge of instructional leadership (Stein & Nelson, 2003). From a multiple case study involving three administrators, leadership content knowledge resulted as a component of what administrators need and should use when operating in the role of instructional leader (Stein & Nelson, 2003). Data collected from interviews and shadowing opportunities revealed the need for leaders to understand their impact on instructional practice and in so doing, to create environments for learning within the school and district (Stein & Nelson, 2003). Therefore, leaders become responsible for nurturing the learning of all within the district.

Leaders at all levels must be aware of their impact and responsibilities in developing the structures that support environments of learning for all. Instructional "leadership is transformed when they [school leaders] come to understand subject matter

more deeply” (Printy, 2008, p. 195). Similarly, Lujan and Day (2010) investigated and reported a positive impact leaders had in the implementation of professional learning communities as set and defined by the work of DuFour and DuFour (2006). In a mixed-methods study involving 37 participants, Lujan and Day (2010) collected data using an open-ended survey, one-on-one interviews, and direct observations of PLC meetings and triangulated the data against quantitative data collected by an outside organization. The findings of the study indicated the need to continue efforts to encourage the development of a collaborative culture as well as the importance of establishing shared mission, vision, and goals (Lujan & Day, 2010). The development of a collaborative culture among individuals and leaders responsible for establishing a shared mission, vision, and goals for the organization can be achieved through professional learning communities (Lujan & Day, 2010; DuFour & Marzano, 2011). By achieving a collaborative culture and common understanding of the mission, vision, and goals within a school district, instructional leaders have the potential to systemically influence the learning of all.

When used collectively, sociocultural learning theory and organizational learning theory develop a conceptual framework that focuses on central office administrators and their participation in teaching and learning improvement efforts. Through this framework, the involvement and engagement of central office administrators in assistance relationships with schools and more importantly, the use of their experiences to inform instructional practice is supported (Honig, 2008). Defined practices of assistance relationships with schools were modeling, valuing and legitimizing peripheral participation, creating and sustaining social engagement, developing tools,

brokering/boundary spanning, and supporting engagement in joint work (Honig, 2008). While these practices call for the direct involvement and participation of central office administrators, many may not have the capacity themselves as experts to impart the knowledge required to engage in assistant relationships that bring about change in support of high quality teaching and principal leadership (Honig, 2008). Hence, there is a need for central office administrators to value continuous learning and professional development opportunities that foster engagement in collaborative and reflective practices within social learning and communities of practice models in support of enhancing knowledge of instructional practice for increased student achievement.

Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership and specifically, support from district-level administrators has been found to have a substantially and profoundly positive impact on the success of teachers and the achievement results of students (Chrisman, 2005; Marzano and Waters, 2009). Serving as chief learning officers (Green, 2010), today's leaders must focus attention on developing the ability to create a culture of achievement within the school system rather than solely administering to the management activities associated with planning, organizing, and scheduling functions as well as public relations (Graczewski, Knudson, & Holtzman, 2009). In their qualitative case study of nine elementary schools over a period of 2½ years, Graczewski, Knudson, and Holtzman (2009) revealed the connection between practices of instructional leadership and characteristics of professional development that would likely lead to improved instructional practice. Through this work, they confirmed that leaders at all levels must know the subject matter

and understand how students learn as well as how teachers learn to teach. Central to the findings and pertinent to the goal of this project study was the importance placed on building capacity for instructional practice among administrators as well as teachers and the active involvement of administrators in professional development as a means to that end.

Along similar lines, Marzano and Waters (2009, 2006) identified initiatives or behaviors in which district leadership should engage in order to be successful in positively influencing the achievement of students. Shared in their quantitative meta-analysis of 2,714 districts were the need for district administrators to participate in processes of: “ensuring collaborative goal setting, establishing nonnegotiable goals for achievement and instruction, creating board alignment with and support of district goals, monitoring achievement and instructional goals, and allocating resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction” (Marzano & Waters, 2009, p. 6). Through study and understanding of the collaborative environment and collective responsibility for these common processes, findings suggested a positive influence on student achievement when leaders at the district level were effectively engaged in these leadership behaviors and practices. In conclusion, effective leadership at all levels has the potential to change classroom practice, which in turn directly affects student achievement (Marzano & Walters, 2009).

New roles and responsibilities of leaders in today’s educational landscape as captured in the research are to (a) create and share a vision of teaching and learning, (b) develop and maintain a community of learners who value learning for students and

adults, (c) facilitate and nurture a culture of growth and achievement for all, (d) account for the needs of all students in the improvement process, (e) foster community engagement in activities to support student and staff success, and (f) utilize multiple and varied data sources to target specific areas of instructional improvement (Green, 2010; Grigsby, Schumacker, Decman, & Simieou, 2010; Jenkins, 2009; Johnston, Walker, & Levine, 2010). In their qualitative study of 35 principals as instructional leaders, Grigsby et al. (2010) found greater understanding for principals as instructional leaders with specific focus given to the above mentioned leadership roles and responsibilities. With similar insight and through meta-analysis of recent research, Green (2010) and Jenkins (2009) cited findings that supported administrators as instructional leaders with behaviors aligned with goal setting, resource allocation and management, and curriculum and instruction guidance that promoted increased student learning and achievement. Providing further support in a study involving 60 site visits across 10 cities in urban school districts, Johnston et al. (2010) found and cited the leadership actions as shared above were the greatest contributors to school-wide transformation and increased student achievement. They contend that these qualities need to become the focus for selection, training, and professional learning within the pipeline to the principalship and those in supportive administrative positions.

Inherent in this belief structure and the application of these transformative behaviors is the assumption that leaders have the content knowledge and expertise to create a vision and provide the required direction necessary for improvement in the teaching and learning process (Hoerr, 2008). As a further support through case study

research, Darling-Hammond, Barber, LaFors, and Cohen (2007) found that improvement in the adults' performance served as the precursor to improvement in student achievement. Findings from their research posited the need for educators at all levels to be well versed in content matter as well as best practices in instruction in order for students to benefit from the teaching and learning process. Providing an environment that fosters the continuation of learning for staff and self has become an essential component in the responsibilities of instructional leaders in recent research (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012; Green, 2010). As a result, administrators who choose to be instructional leaders need to possess a command of the content as well as effective leadership practices in order to influence the practices of teacher and influence the achievement of students.

In support of Darling-Hammond et al. (2007) and the belief that continuous learning leads to improvement, further research studies shared concern among administrators for the need to improve their own knowledge of curriculum and instruction as well as methods of professional growth in order to assist teachers in the classroom (Grigsby et al., 2010; King, 2002). In their qualitative study of 35 instructional leaders involving 30 minute interviews, Grigsby et al. (2010) cited the need for greater content knowledge and a focus on increased instructional strategy and methodology in order to support system-wide improvement in instructional practice and student achievement. This type of learning and professional growth for administrators may best be served through the tenets of social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) and the communities of practice Model (Lave & Wenger, 1998). As summarized in these works over the years,

collaborative and reflective practices used in the sharing of knowledge and expertise account for learning experienced by self and others.

Collaborative and Reflective Practices for Instructional Leadership

Professional accountability for continued learning and growth requires teachers and educational leaders to be critical and reflective in their thinking as well as collaborative in their practices (McLester, 2012; Schlachter, 2013). Cultures of collaboration and reflection within school systems have been reported in the research literature to allow the learning community to capitalize on the strengths, knowledge, and expertise of each member; staff and administrators, alike (Horton & Martin, 2013) when attempting to maximize the learning effectiveness for all. Horton and Martin (2013) used qualitative inquiry strategies and purposeful sampling techniques in a multiple case study of three school districts. Through interviews, focus groups, observations, and document reviews, the results stressed the importance of district leadership in creating collaborative and reflective environments where “distributive leadership and a sense of collective efficacy and responsibility for student learning” (Horton & Martin, 2013, p. 62) become the focus.

By its very nature, reflective practice has the potential to increase learning at all levels in the organization and as a result, the power to improve practice and student achievement. Reflective practice is the basis for creating an increased level of self-awareness regarding the nature and impact of one’s performance as well as providing opportunities for professional growth and development (Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993). In this process and represented by two different frames of reference, Schon (1987) has

shared that *reflection in action* is thinking about our actions or what we are doing at the very moment we are engaged in the doing, while *reflection on action* is the kind of thought that occurs in anticipation of or as a result of an act. In either framework and by Schon's reference, knowledge and experience spark inquiry and engagement.

Actions involving reflection foster potential for new knowledge, growth, and improvement in performance for an individual or group as in *joint working situations* found in educational settings (James, Dunning, Connolly, & Elliot, 2007). Data collected through semi-structured interviews and group discussions of governors and headmasters, teachers, and community members across 18 schools and 12 local authorities in Wales uncovered common themes when analyzing collaborative and reflective practices in the creation of joint working environments (James et al., 2007). Recurring themes among the cases in the study pointed to aspects of collaboration, reflective practice, and the need to focus on the primary task in order to be successful.

As leaders in education utilize reflective practices, increases in their capacity for critical self-reflection in and on practice will likely occur while at the same time promoting inquiry among others in the learning community (Storey & Beeman, 2009). In similar regard, leaders engaged in joint working collaborative practices will contribute to increased self-knowledge and a shared capacity for social learning and change among colleagues (James et al., 2007). Reflective and collaborative practices utilized in this way greatly contribute to the learning of others, consequently serve as professional development, that as a process is highly effective in not only achieving but also maintaining changes in behavior and improved practices (Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993).

As a result, aspects of professional development and continuous learning that provide opportunities for individuals to be engaged in self-reflection and contributing to an atmosphere of collaborative sharing pose the greatest potential for increased learning and sustained practice.

Collaborative and reflective practices in leadership foster the acquisition of new knowledge and common understanding while also developing aspects of self-efficacy among practicing administrators (Heck & Hallinger, 2010). Through their quantitative study research involving 195 elementary schools over a 4-year period, Heck and Hallinger (2010) tested unidirectional- and reciprocal-effects models of collaborative leadership and school capacity for improvement and growth in student learning. Three models related to the indirect and reciprocal effects of leadership and growth were developed and tested. The findings supported collaborative leadership and school improvement capacity as a systemic relationship evidenced by reciprocity or mutual reinforcement. In this context, collaborative practices constituted “shared school governance, which encourages shared vision, broad participation, and shared accountability for learning; collaborative decisions focusing on academic improvement; and broad participation in efforts to evaluate the school’s academic development” (Heck & Hallinger, 2010, p. 237-238). Evidence for the collaborative and responsive nature of leadership surfaced through aspects of reflection and the acquisition of new knowledge to foster change in practices and improvement in student achievement (Heck & Hallinger, 2010). Therefore, it is important to note the power of and potential for collaborative

leadership in enhancing instructional practice and influencing student growth and achievement.

The essence of effective instructional leadership in working with teachers to improve practice and increase student achievement is rooted in a shared vision and common understanding of collaborative practices (Marzano & Waters, 2009). In further defining the qualities of effective collaborative practice, Grigsby et al. (2010) investigated principal behaviors as instructional leaders in a qualitative study involving 30-minute interviews of 35 principals. Their findings suggested that instructional leadership style was more collaborative in environments marked by leadership involvement in key aspects of curriculum and instruction, support for teachers through classroom visits, and the quality of professional development provided. Through the development of collaborative practices and increased open-mindedness among administrators and teachers as demonstrated in the qualitative case study research of Ostorga (2006), critical reflective thought process in these areas was fostered. As a result, principals and instructional leaders recognized and valued the need to improve their own professional growth in order to help teachers (Grigsby et al., 2010; Ostorga, 2006) and in so doing, demonstrated the collaborative, reflective, and instructional models of leadership.

In a related fashion, quantitative data from 616 teacher reports from 77 schools evidenced the instructional support provided from principals and leaders as having significantly and positively predicted the degree to which differentiated instructional practices were implemented (Goddard, Neumerski, Goddard, Salloum, & Berebitsky,

2010) and resulted in increased student achievement. Within each study, evidence cited the benefits of shared visioning and collaborative efforts between leaders and teachers in creating an environment of effective instructional practices and increased student achievement. The reliance on shared visioning and collaborative efforts suggests the need for instructional leaders to be continually enhancing their understanding of curriculum and instructional practices. Therefore, instructional leaders would be advantaged to seek continuous learning experiences and opportunities for professional growth to guide teachers and influence student achievement.

Distributive and collaborative leadership are essential to the continued growth of all in the learning organization (James, Mann, & Creasy, 2012). Using qualitative study research, Hupia and Devos (2010) conducted semi-structured individual and focus group interviews involving distributive leadership and teachers' organizational commitment in eight schools. Distributive leadership refers to the sharing of leadership tasks or functions among a group of people who share expertise and responsibility for the outcome (Hupia & Devos, 2010; Spillane, 2006). Findings suggested that teachers demonstrated a greater level of commitment in schools where leaders were visible and accessible, dealt with problems effectively, and in so doing, empowered teachers to be involved while also monitoring the daily practices of teachers.

James, Mann, and Creasy (2012) furthered the research regarding shared, distributive, and collaborative leadership learning for school leaders in a program evaluation of the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) in England. In the study, James et al., (2012) defined learning as “communities, schools, teachers, pupils,

and leaders learning from each other, with each other and ultimately, on behalf of each other” (p. 87). With this definition, learning takes place as a systemic and collaborative approach rather than an individualistic venture as most often portrayed. Within the study project, James et al. (2012) worked to develop participants’ understanding of their role in leading their collaborative leadership learning group and in developing learning that could be shared and disseminated to others. This research outlined the importance of systemic rather than individualistic approaches to growth. The project and related research contributed significantly to the practices of reflection and opportunities for application of leadership and facilitation of learning within a community of common stakeholders (James et al., 2012).

In a similar manner and through the development of collaborative partnerships and communities of stakeholders among 17 colleges and universities in the New Jersey System of Higher Education, the value of continuous learning, professional development, and reflective dialogue was studied and realized (Goduto, Doolittle, & Leake, 2008). Collaborative discourse, collective inquiry, and reflective meetings among the teams in this case study research resulted in findings that evidenced enhancement and improvement in leadership practices and ultimately, student achievement. Collaborative and systemic learning provides opportunity for all in the school community to continue learning and modeling best practices to support changes in instruction, which may yield increased student achievement.

For collaborative and reflective leaders focusing on improving instructional practice and student achievement, setting goals and priorities in addition to professional

learning aimed at “direction, alignment, and commitment to advance their collective work,” (Ospina & Saz-Carranza, 2010, p. 414) is essential. Targeting these goals has the potential to increase leader knowledge and practice as well as the collective efficacy of all in the learning system as presented in the qualitative interpretive research study of two urban immigration networks in the United States (Ospina & Saz-Carranza, 2010). Data were collected from in-depth interviews with leaders and structured group conversations with other staff from 20 organizations participating in a leadership recognition program over a two-year period. The findings supported the use of collaborative and reflective practices and the idea that leadership is a relational process created when groups engage in shared activities and discourse to achieve their collective goals (Ospina & Saz-Carranza, 2010). With a new view of collaborative and reflective practices, leaders may challenge the status quo in search of new methods and better results for the ultimate goal of increasing their knowledge of instructional practice and assisting teachers in improving student achievement. Improvement in teaching and learning for adults and students can occur simultaneously with increased knowledge and strengthened leadership capacity at the school and district level (Hallinger & Heck, 2010) and is supported through collaborative and sustained professional learning and sharing (King, 2011). Thus, with professional development through shared learning and the use of collaborative and reflective practices between and among leaders and teachers, increased knowledge of effective instructional practices and higher levels of student achievement may be the result.

Professional Learning and Development

Continuing in the spirit of collaborative and reflective practices, Doolittle, Sudeck, & Rattigan (2008) focused attention on creating strong professional development school partnerships that lead to professional learning communities. Through a multiple case study of 12 school-university partnerships in which data were collected from field notes, surveys, meeting minutes, and classroom observations, findings supported that adult learning occurred best as a result of research and practitioner knowledge and when rooted in a real-world setting. Within the study, professional development schools incorporated collaborative structures in building relationships in order to provide the best preparation experiences for educators and administrators. As a result and in support of collaborative and reflective practices, reciprocal learning took place among school staff, administrators, and college faculty with teacher candidates learning from both, which demonstrated a model of learning for all, including the K through 12 students (Doolittle, et al., 2008). Within the model, researchers created collaborative structures across the entire school learning community as well as with key stakeholders in the larger community outside the school building. Issues were addressed and learning took place within organizational structures that provided for a common understanding and purpose among all participants and led to systemic change within the school community. Teachers and administrators alike enhanced their effectiveness by sharing values and personal practices to the benefit of the instructional practices implemented with students.

Effective professional development exists through collective participation approaches where adult learners participate alongside and learn from each other (Penuel,

Fishman, Yamaguchi, & Gallagher, 2007). Through a 2-year quantitative study involving 454 educators, findings revealed that opportunities for effective professional development that incorporated longer durations and time spans were more likely to result in the integration of new knowledge into practice. In addition, the added benefit of creating collaborative and collective participation communities in which individuals participated alongside colleagues within their school and district was supported by theories of social learning (Bandura, 1977) and communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1998) models. This type of job-embedded professional learning is a growing focus in leadership development where leaders may continuously support each other through collaborative and reflective inquiry, peer coaching, and modeling that facilitates shared knowledge and builds common understanding for practices within schools and districts (Fullan, 2009). To this end and with the use of collaborative, job-embedded forms of professional development, districts may be in strong position to positively impact student achievement through the implementation of instructional practices that are rooted in knowledge and understanding that are common to all.

Researchers have identified the critical role of the instructional leaders and specifically, principals in fostering collaborative learning communities among faculties and within school systems in order to facilitate professional development, collaboration, and reflection as a means to school improvement (Jappinen, 2012; King, 2011). Through a qualitative multiple case study of five urban schools in Ireland, King (2011) explored the role of leadership in developing and sustaining professional learning. Administrator and staff interviews and school visits over a 10-week period of time resulted in evidence

that leadership played a vital role in enabling and fostering collaboration in order to develop and sustain professional learning and sharing that lead to increased knowledge as well as enhanced expertise and skill levels. Findings suggested that collaborative leadership supported teachers in developing professional learning communities, which greatly contributed to collaborative sharing and sustaining of best instructional practices.

Lending further support to the effects of collaborative and distributive pedagogical leadership in professional learning, Jappinen (2012) conducted a mixed methods study. The study was instrumental in identifying 10 key attributes of leadership and the facilitation of professional learning communities. Quantitatively, the study included 150 schools in Finland with 257 survey participants responding: 180 of the participants were from schools other than the case study school. Researchers analyzed T-values from two-tailed independent sample tests as well as the qualitative data from six semi-structured interviews of the leadership team within the case study school. The work of Jappinen (2012) and the results of this study supported collaborative leadership practices and the presence of key characteristics in the development of a professional learning community aimed at enhancing knowledge of instructional practice

In their review of literature and real-world work experience, Mullen and Hutingger (2008) identified the importance of the school principal in facilitating and supporting faculty study groups as a form of professional development. By providing opportunities and resources for professional development and specifically, study groups, principals fostered increased teacher learning and improved student achievement. Through this analysis, principal knowledge and experience in leading professional development

opportunities for staff to affect student achievement surfaced in its importance. Thus, continuous learning and professional development opportunities for leaders are essential in creating the foundation for enhancing instructional leadership and improving practice for increased student achievement.

In drawing a parallel to this research and providing extended meaning for those in central office, district-level administrators need to be knowledgeable of and experienced in instructional practice in order to support the learning of all in the organization (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). Therefore, central office administrators need to be continually engaged in opportunities that increase and enhance their knowledge and understanding of best instructional practice. In this way, they become the leaders of learning (DuFour & Marzano, 2011) and supporters of increased student achievement by fostering a culture of achievement and an emphasis on learning for all. Accordingly and based on the work of DuFour and Marzano (2011), effective central office leaders have the responsibility of building shared knowledge and common understanding of goals and practices throughout the learning organization in order to create a culture of collaboration and achievement for all.

Additional studies point to importance of leadership involvement in instructional practices. Graczewski, Knudson, and Holtzman (2009) concluded building capacity for leader and staff knowledge of instructional practice is essential to the improvement of student achievement. Graczewski et al. (2009) conducted survey and case study qualitative research involving interviews of principals, peer coaches and up to 12 teachers randomly selected across grade levels of nine elementary schools. In addition, members

of the research team shadowed and observed each principal's leadership in action, professional development sessions, and team leadership meetings at each site.

Connections between practices of instructional leadership and characteristics of professional development that would likely lead to improved instructional practices and student achievement were the focus of the study and reported in the results. Central to the findings and specific to the research was the importance placed on leadership capacity and specifically, the content knowledge of the principal and leadership team in creating and facilitating professional development experiences and environments focused on interactive learning.

The importance of these findings and further supported in the work of DuFour and Marzano (2011) is the consideration that effective district leaders build shared knowledge throughout the organization. In facilitating this goal, Graczewski et al. (2009) posited that "leaders at all levels must know the subject matter, understand how students learn the material, and understand how teachers learn to teach the material" (p. 91). With knowledge of subject matter and a comprehensive understanding of the learning process for students and teachers, district leaders can support the growth and learning of all in an organization. Through collaborative and supportive actions, district leaders can foster a culture of shared learning and beliefs regarding instructional practice and goals for student achievement.

Implications

Educational leaders in today's schools and the central office administrators employed to support them are called upon to respond to the demands of increased student

achievement. Continuous learning and professional development opportunities for central office administrators can support challenging requirements for effective instructional practice and increased student achievement. The investigation into the ways in which central office administrators experience continuous learning and professional development opportunities to enhance their knowledge of instructional practice and influence student achievement offered new ideas and avenues for change within the district. The creation of improved and systemic professional development opportunities for central office administrators as a means to establishing a Communities of Practice Model (Wenger, 2006) for enhancing knowledge of instructional practice was the focus of the project and was instrumental in leading to an aspect of social change for the district.

By establishing a means for collective inquiry and the use of collaborative and reflective practices, a culture of collaboration and reflection for systems thinking and continuous learning (Senge et al., 1990) can be fostered. Incorporating professional development using technology and a communities of practice model may expand opportunities to learn and to share best practice among central office administrators and became the focus of a project plan in response to this research and study. Through a collaborative and reflective environment with a focus on lifelong learning and continual improvement, knowledge can be constructed and shared in order to enhance and inform instructional practice. In this way, central office administrators can experience job-embedded professional development and continuous learning opportunities as a means to enhance their knowledge and influence the teaching and learning process.

Summary

The content and findings shared within the literature review in this section provide evidence of studies of collaborative and reflective leadership practices as well as the importance of continuous learning and professional development and their potential in enhancing administrators' knowledge of effective instructional leadership and practice. While the evidence appears plentiful in regards to those in positions of building level leadership, it is still in need of further development for those in positions of central office leadership in order to serve in assistance relationships to further the work of the schools and the district. In considering the gap in practice through this research proposal and study, this project study was designed to explore the ways in which central office administrators experience continuous learning and professional development opportunities in order to enhance knowledge of effective instructional leadership and practice. Collected and analyzed data assisted in examining the ways in which opportunities for continuous learning and professional development are presently experienced by district level administrators and the perceptions regarding the effectiveness of those practices as a vehicle for enhancing their knowledge of instructional practice.

In subsequent sections, I will introduce the research design and methodology, identify results and state conclusions of the process, as well as share direction regarding the project. The project will serve to assimilate information from the study into an action plan to address the findings and recommendations of the research. As a final piece, I will identify aspects of social change within the scholar practitioner model.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

The problem identified and addressed in this qualitative project study was the lack of a formal or systemic plan for central office administrators to experience professional development concerning increasing and enhancing knowledge of instructional practice (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012; Doyle, 2004; Honig, 2012; Lambert, 2005). The study explored the ways in which central office administrators experience opportunities for continuous learning and professional development in order to enhance knowledge of effective instructional leadership and practice. Data collection and analysis served to examine the ways in which opportunities for continuous learning and professional development were experienced by district level administrators and their perceptions regarding the effectiveness of those practice as a vehicle for enhancing their knowledge of instructional leadership and practice. The local setting for the descriptive qualitative case study was a large suburban school district in southeastern Pennsylvania. Within the study, a purposeful sampling technique (Creswell, 2012; Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010) was used for the intentional selection of individuals with first-hand knowledge and experience with practices in the school district. Participants included central office administrators who support and influence the practices of building-level leaders and teachers in the district. In this section, I discuss and explain in further detail the research design, sampling procedures, data collection and analysis methods, results, and conclusions.

The purpose of this project study was to investigate the ways in which central office administrators experienced opportunities for continuous learning and professional development and the perceptions regarding the effectiveness of those practices as a vehicle for enhancing their knowledge of instructional leadership and practice. The subquestions that guided the study were:

1. In what ways do central office administrators experience opportunities for continuous learning in order to increase their knowledge of instructional leadership and practice?
2. How does the district support opportunities for continuous learning and professional development for central office administrators?
3. In what ways do central office administrators use what they have learned in support of instructional practice in the district?

Research Design

Research adds to our knowledge, improves our practice, and informs the policies by which we live (Creswell, 2012). In the world of research, quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods designs are all forms to consider when designing the appropriate approach for the topic of study. Within the realm of quantitative research, instruments and measures that are used develop numerical values and comparisons that when statistically analyzed serve as the primary vehicle to explaining a problem through the relationship among variables (Creswell, 2012; Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research employs a different approach and focuses on exploring a problem and formulating a detailed understanding through a discovered or evidenced

phenomenon (Creswell, 2012; Glesne, 2011). Attempting to combine the positivist methodology of quantitative design and the interpretive methodology of qualitative approaches according to Glesne (2011) would still yield two studies due to the differences in views. One could however combine the methods or techniques of quantitative and qualitative into a mixed-methods or action research design in order to support and supplement one form of research for another (Glesne, 2011); thus, creating a strengthened and balanced result.

Considering the various forms of research and understanding the purpose of this study to be investigative in nature while providing descriptions of current practice and perceptions of effectiveness regarding the use of continuous learning and professional development opportunities in a specific district, I determined that a qualitative design would best meet the needs of the identified problem. A qualitative design would best afford the opportunity to delve further into the practices at question and capture the experiences and perceptions of participants in a richly descriptive and narrative way.

In this project study, I used a descriptive qualitative case study design to address the research question and explore the ways in which central office administrators in the specified southeastern school district experience opportunities for continuous learning and professional development. I employed a descriptive design within the bounded case study to understand professional development and continuous learning opportunities as a means to enhancing knowledge of instructional leadership and practice of central office administrators better (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). Case study design by its very definition focuses on in-depth explorations of bounded systems in order to understand

and interpret observations of educational phenomena based upon extensive collection of data (Creswell, 2007; Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Merriam, 2009). In focusing on the continuous learning and professional development opportunities of central office administration, the study involved exploring and describing the beliefs and perceptions of district-level administrators responsible for supporting instructional leadership and practice provided to the 18 district schools. The district employs an organizational structure and support system for buildings that is comprised of a superintendent and assistant superintendent of schools, director of elementary, director of secondary, director of special education, director of curriculum, director of technology, supervisors of special education, and supervisors of curriculum.

I considered other qualitative design methods such as ethnography, phenomenological research, and grounded theory but determined them to be less effective, given the nature of the problem and research question, which is specific to the Southeastern School District identified for the study. Ethnographic research focuses on human society and culture through attitudes, beliefs, and values that drive the research (Merriam, 2009) whereas phenomenological research is rooted in an individual's experiences and the interpretation of those over time (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). In grounded theory research, a belief or theory that emerges from data collection over time and in many cases from different groups of people is the basis of study (Merriam, 2009). While all are forms of qualitative research and as such focus on people interpreting and constructing their worlds and experiences (Merriam, 2009), the case study approach which focuses on addressing a phenomenon in context with the potential

to be richly descriptive as a result of various data sources (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006), would be best suited and selected.

The intent of the qualitative descriptive case study was to investigate the ways in which central office administrators experience opportunities for continuous learning and professional development in order to enhance their knowledge of effective instructional leadership and practice (Creswell, 2009). As a result, this qualitative descriptive case study included open-ended survey questions of central office administrators and review of public and private documents in the school district. In this manner and in order to triangulate data for credibility and accuracy, I reviewed the District's Comprehensive and Strategic Plan (2011-2014) as a public document that serves as the vision for the work of the district and private documents such as meeting agendas, shared goal projects, and minutes from committee work as found in the district's Administrative SharePoint site.

Sampling Procedures

Participant Selection and Justification

Central office administrators who provide support to each other and to district instructional staff served as participants of the qualitative descriptive case study. The research questions are specific to the issue of continuous learning and professional development within the Southeastern School District and as a result, warranted the use of a purposeful sampling method (Creswell, 2012) for selection of participants. This selection method resulted from and supported a desire to understand the thoughts and perceptions of central office administrators regarding their knowledge of instructional leadership and practice in support of the teaching and learning process.

In addition, and because of developing a detailed understanding of central office administrators, purposeful sampling was organized. In this sampling method, the following 18 individuals served as central office administrator participants: the district superintendent; assistant superintendent; director of elementary education, director of secondary education; director of special education, assistant director of special education, and seven special education supervisors; director of curriculum and three curriculum supervisors; and the director of technology. Inclusion of central office administrators in all departments associated with instruction in the district led to saturation and redundancy while establishing a greater depth than breadth of understanding of the opportunities for continuous learning and professional development leading to enhanced instructional knowledge for leadership and practice (Glesne, 2011). The study and participants focused exclusively on central office administrators. Building level leadership did not participate due to my recent but past role as director of elementary education and potential for bias in having lead and supervised members of the elementary principal group within the district.

Participant Access and Researcher Relationship

Participation of the central office administrators previously identified was a result of their leadership role in the district and through their voluntary consent. Access to these individuals and colleagues happened via email and in the Educational Services Building in which everyone works, which allowed for ease and comfort. The assistant superintendent, the person with organizational authority in the Southeastern School District, granted conditional cooperation (Appendix B) contingent upon the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Walden University. Upon approval from IRB of Walden

University (01-05-15-0226614), contact was made with each identified individual via email and in person within the building in which we work. All potential participants received a synopsis of the study purpose and research methods through a participation letter (Appendix C) and detailed consent information (Appendix D). Participants provided implied consent with the submission of the completed survey administered both electronically and anonymously. Communicated to all participants was the voluntary nature of their participation and the opportunity to withdraw at any time during the study (Creswell, 2012).

In seeking to understand the ways in which central office administrators experience opportunities for continuous learning and professional development, I functioned in the role of researcher through the administration of the survey and document review (Glesne, 2011). Initial contact with participants occurred via email to share an introductory participant letter (Appendix C). The purpose and format of the study, including data collection procedures, appeared in the detailed consent information as emailed to all potential participants (Appendix D).

A comfortable researcher-participant relationship existed due to my role in the district as a member of the central office team and having a working relationship with the potential participants. Prior experiences as an educator and current experiences as an administrator provided knowledge of instructional practice and professional development to facilitate the collection, organization, and analysis of data. The goal of the study was to investigate ways in which central office administrators experience opportunities for

continuous learning and professional development in order to enhance their knowledge of effective instructional leadership and practice.

Ethical Protection of Participants

Ethical considerations and protections of participants are of utmost importance to the researcher as well as the validity and credibility of the research and information in a qualitative study (Glesne, 2011; Merriam, 2009). In ensuring the ethical protections of the central office administrators in the study, all participants received information regarding the purpose and rationale of the study as well as the potential benefits to future educators. In this way, they were able to make informed decisions regarding their voluntary participation and fully understood the opportunity to withdraw at any time during the study as outlined on the consent form. Anonymously collecting and securely maintaining all data from the survey results and document reviews fostered confidentiality. Anonymous data collection means reinforced the confidentiality and anonymity of responses for all participants, who in their roles as central office administrators with many years of experience in the field of education were over the age of 21 and at no risk for their involvement.

According to Merriam (2009) and in the end, “the best a researcher can do is to be conscious of the ethical issues that pervade the research process and to examine his or her own philosophical orientation vis-à-vis these issues” (p. 235). As the researcher in this qualitative descriptive case study, I reviewed and followed all protocols and conditions for the protection of participants as outlined by the Walden University Institutional Review Board.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred following approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board and took place over a 3-month period with consent given from the focus district. Qualitative research is best served through multiple data collection techniques and as such, the study included open-ended survey questions (Appendix F) of 18 central office administrators sent electronically via Survey-Monkey, analysis of the comprehensive plan, and review of public documents as well as those considered private and stored on the administrative SharePoint (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). The survey consisted of five main questions with clarifying subquestions for a total of 15 open-ended response questions. These questions in addition to the plan analysis and document reviews served to provide data in response to the research question of the study. The link to the survey was embedded in the detailed consent form (Appendix D) so that access to the survey and the responses provided were assured anonymity. Consultation with a panel of experts comprised of central office administrators in a neighboring school district validated the survey questions.

The survey involved five main questions with several subquestions focusing on the participants' knowledge of continuous learning and the ways in which professional development were experienced. The first question sought to identify the way in which the participants felt they learn best. Broken out separately, the second and third questions and subquestions of each directed the respondents' attention to the ways in which central office administrators experience opportunities for continuous learning and professional development as they relate to instructional knowledge and skills. These questions as well

as the information from document review formulated the data and response to research subquestion 1: In what ways do central office administrators experience opportunities for continuous learning in order to increase their knowledge of instructional practice? and subquestion 2: How does the District provide opportunities for professional development to central office administrators? The fourth question asked the participants to share their beliefs as to whether or not and if so, how these practices prepare them to influence the practice of others in the organization. This question along with the document reviews assisted in responding to the third subquestion of the research: In what ways do central office administrators use what they have learned in support of instructional practice in the district? The final question asked respondents to share their thoughts related to what might help enhance their ability to be an instructional leader with a subquestion that focused on opportunities the district might have to use collaborative and reflective practices for continuous learning and professional development opportunities. It provided insight into the ways in which school districts can systemically plan professional development for central office administrators, resulting in a potential focus of a project and aspect of social change given the results and comprehensive findings of the study.

Public and private document review (Appendix H) and analysis of the comprehensive plan offered insight into the job-embedded practices utilized by administrators when supporting each other and enhancing their knowledge of instructional leadership and practice. Documents reviewed on the District SharePoint site included:

- Meeting agendas and minutes.

- Professional goals.
- Projects.
- Committee work.

The analysis of the documents provided information regarding the ways in which central office administrators experienced continuous learning and professional development opportunities as well as the ways in which what they have learned is used in line with their job responsibilities. In addition, the document reviews demonstrated limited district support for providing administrators with training opportunities in direct relationship to the district initiatives. Peer examination (Merriam, 2009), which allowed a knowledgeable colleague to scan and review the raw data for plausibility of the findings also existed as part of the data analysis. In this way, data were reviewed for accuracy and to provide assurance against the possibility of researcher bias. While all data and findings shared were collected anonymously and presented to the peer examiner in that manner, a confidentiality agreement was signed and is included as Appendix J. Triangulation (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009) of data sources and peer examination served as strategies to minimize misinterpretation of information and ensure credibility of the results.

As is true in qualitative research, I collected, coded, and analyzed data concurrently within each of the identified processes of the open-ended survey, plan analysis, and document review. Data were stored and maintained electronically on portable external hard drives, easily secured in a locked location in my home office, and

accessed solely by me as the researcher. My personal and private computer served as the vehicle for data access with work completed privately and securely in a home office.

Role of the Researcher

In all qualitative research, the role of the researcher is a major consideration with respect to credibility and the assurance of validity and trustworthiness within the study (Merriam, 2009). As the researcher and having worked as the director of elementary education within the central office of the identified district, I possess direct knowledge of the district as well as working relationships with those involved in the study. In current administrative roles, the participants and I, now as the director of human resources, share responsibilities for leadership in the district. Extensive training in and experiences as an educator and adjunct professor, principal, and central office administrator have provided me with first-hand knowledge of effective instructional leadership and practice as well as aspects of collaboration and reflection that take place on grade level and administrative teams when professional development and student achievement are the focus.

As the researcher with professional experiences working in teams and communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1998; Wenger, 2006), I believe that collaborative and reflective practices can provide opportunities for continuous learning and enhance knowledge of effective instruction. I further believe that these practices provide a platform for professional learning and development and could serve as an aspect of social change for the way in which central office administrators share knowledge and influence instructional practices. Because of these beliefs and the potential for bias, I was open to contrary opinions and discrepant cases and have reported

findings as accurately as possible for each case presented. In order to control for my own biases and in addition to the process of data triangulation, I also involved a critical colleague in scanning and reviewing the raw data against the findings for plausibility through the process of peer examination (Merriam, 2009).

Due to my experiences and direct contact in the field and district, I am aware of my own biases regarding values, beliefs, and perceptions pertaining to professional development and continuous learning opportunities as a way of enhancing knowledge of effective instructional practice. If known to the participants, my knowledge and beliefs could have the potential to influence their responses and limit the effects of the study. In light of this, I refrained from sharing my personal values and beliefs with the participants and remained diligent in presenting data and findings openly and honestly.

Data Analysis

Data collection and analysis are simultaneous processes in qualitative research methods; each having the ability to affect the other in an ongoing way (Merriam, 2009). During the analysis phase, I familiarized myself with the data and initially organized it by type and question and then by category and subcategory as suggested through the coding process. Data were triangulated, reviewed repeatedly, and coded continually as themes and connections emerged (Creswell, 2009). In working with the electronic tool, I downloaded and organized response information from Survey Monkey into Word and Excel documents for sorting and highlighting and then the developed form (Appendix F, G) to code the information. I analyzed responses by question initially to identify specific

categories and subcategories and then coded each accordingly for further analysis and the emergence of themes as presented in detail in the findings section.

Within the 3-month period that paralleled the administration of the open-ended survey, I also conducted document analysis of the Comprehensive Plan as published publically on the district website for all stakeholders. In addition, I analyzed documents from the district SharePoint folders that chronicled information pertaining to professional development and continuous learning opportunities present in Cabinet and K-12 meetings, district administrative meetings, shared goal projects, and committee work regarding curriculum and district initiatives. The documents were accessed through the Sharepoint site, an electronic collection place for storage and retrieval of summary documents and available through the district intranet site. I reviewed and coded information from 32 documents and provided a sample in Appendix H. A more thorough summary of the analysis is contained in the Findings section and organized by each study question.

During the analysis, similar themes and insights relevant to the practices employed in enhancing instructional knowledge for leadership and practice emerged. Throughout the analysis of data, I was careful to document all ideas shared in survey responses and as found throughout the document review as summarized and presented in the findings. Triangulation of data from survey results, review of the Comprehensive Plan, and analysis across the 32 document and artifact sources (Creswell, 2012) served as a means for establishing trustworthiness of the data and findings.

Findings

In a large suburban school district in the northeastern region of the United States, a problem regarding the way in which central office administrators experienced opportunities for continuous learning and professional development was studied. Charged with the mission, vision, and responsibilities for forward movement of the district, central office administrators lack a formal plan for systemic professional development focused on increasing their knowledge of instructional practice and enhancing their instructional leadership. Surveying central office administrators, conducting document reviews of administrative meetings, committee work, and shared goal projects, and analyzing the Comprehensive Plan in the district has led to greater understanding of the lack of a systemic plan for continuous learning and professional development as well as personal experiences and perceptions of the administrators. Findings supported the thought that collaborative and reflective practices serve as meaningful ways for central office administrators to experience continuous learning and professional development opportunities in order to enhance their knowledge of instructional leadership and practice.

In question 1 of the study, I sought information on the ways in which central office administrators experienced opportunities for continuous learning and professional development in order to increase their knowledge of instructional leadership and practice. Question 2 considered how the district supports opportunities for continuous learning and professional development for central office administrators. Question 3 of the study inquired about the ways in which central office administrators used what they have learned in support of instructional practice and leadership in the district. Each of the

questions will be discussed separately to provide a thorough understanding of information shared through the open-ended survey and discovered in the review of private and public documents of the school district. A communities of practice (Wenger, 2006) lens combined with social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) will provide the theoretical framework through which the information is shared.

Question 1: In what ways do central office administrators experience opportunities for continuous learning in order to increase their knowledge of instructional leadership and practice?

Survey Results

Twelve participants responded to question one and its subquestions regarding continuous learning and professional development experiences. All respondents stated knowledge of and experiences in working with collaborative and reflective practices. Strength and value in collaboration and discussions with colleagues supported themes of sharing knowledge, influencing others, and collaboration and reflections with others. Eight administrators shared that they engaged in these practices in order to process their thinking and ask clarifying questions with others. One central office administrator (COA) shared,

I learn best through collaboration and application followed by opportunity to reflect and adjust. I value the reflection time, whether collaborative or individual, to process the information provided and consider the best ways to incorporate it into practice in a holistic, integrated way. (COA 5)

Another stated, “I learn best by collaborating with others. Listening, conversing, etc. I can learn by reading on my own, but it is more tightly engrained when that is followed by discourse” (COA 6). Another colleague identified that “self-reflection and feedback on lessons learned after completing a major project were key to learning as was reading about the successes of others and/or hearing about the successes of others at gatherings of job alike groups” (COA 9).

All 12 respondents stressed the importance of observation and application through the theme of job-embedded opportunities on a daily basis as a major aspect of their learning. The research of Silva (2015) best supports this information and analysis in confirming that formal and informal learning, as well as on-the-job learning are the best ways to learn. In this way, hands on application and assimilation of new knowledge to real world situations can be attained for the most meaningful of experiences and is supported by the district as a result of central office administrator job responsibilities.

In addition, and when asked of their knowledge of collaborative and/or reflective practices, all respondents professed extensive knowledge of collaborative and reflective practices as modes of continuous learning. All respondents stated that collaborative and reflective practices increased their knowledge and skills and provided for growth as an individual. When asked to provide examples of collaborative and reflective practices as experienced in continuous learning opportunities, all 12 administrators included cognitive coaching, participation in graduate courses and/or webinars, collegial discourse in

formal and informal meetings, book studies and study groups, supervisor meetings, appraisal and evaluation conferences, work in committees and professional learning communities, and goals and initiatives involving cross-departmental projects. Central office administrator five (COA 5) shared,

My knowledge of collaborative and/or reflective practices for learning includes adult learning theory as well as cooperative learning and group dynamics information. Adults prefer to learn in collaboration with other adults, and they prefer to have the learning occur in a context in which they can consider application to practice rather than strictly theoretical learning. Having colleagues to collaborate with on learning exercises deepens the processing of the knowledge and provides alternative viewpoints and practices through which all can learn. Being an introvert, I value the ‘quiet time’ provided for reflection to process information and determine next steps in a thoughtful manner.

Respondents reported the presence of collaborative practices as supported by their work in the district through supervisory meetings, committee meetings, study groups, discussion and case study analysis, online discussion, and sharing of best practices through demonstration lessons and presentations. However, one central office administrator referenced the creation of the District’s Comprehensive Plan as having the appearance of being collaborative in structure but lacking a shared vision in the reality of the process:

In an ideal world, many practices would be truly collaborative such as the comprehensive plan, decision making, developing and carrying out a shared vision. Some departments are working toward collaborative practices better than others. However, in my current role and district, not many of these things are truly collaborative. Processes like the development of the comprehensive plan was designed to be collaborative, but in the end it was not a true collaboration. Separate groups working in silos and producing one document/plan is not collaborative. Though one may believe it was because of the group structure, it wasn't. There is no shared vision. (COA 6)

Respondents suggested the presence of reflective practices in opportunities that measured the implementation and effectiveness of actions relating to the goals and initiatives of the school district. Also shared were times of contemplation about one's own practice as well as that of others when working together. Reading and considering how theories can be put into practice as well as reflecting on one's own successes and challenges for improvement were also thoughts that were shared in support of the themes of collaboration and reflection that emerged in responses. One participant (COA 10) offered "online journal or any type of journal to review your work or experiences with education as well as reflecting with others as a small group or with a mentor" as practices considered to be reflective in nature. This central office administrator concluded by sharing that, "reflective practice is critical to continued improvement" (COA 10), which is

further confirmed through the reciprocal processes of learning and the work of Bandura (1977) in social learning theory.

In summary and in response to question 1 through the survey, central office administrators experienced opportunities for professional development and continuous learning in varied ways and most often, as they relate to their job responsibilities. Examples of opportunities included supervisory meetings, committee meetings, study groups, discussion and case study analysis, online discussion, and sharing of best practices through demonstration lessons and presentations. Themes of knowledge sharing, influence for others, collaboration and reflection with others, and job-embedded opportunities that were realistic and meaningful emerged in responses and were substantiated by the examples provided and discussed.

Document Reviews

Through Cabinet and K-12, District Administrative, Curriculum & Instruction meetings, as supported in documentation, central office administrators have been responsible for the ways in which building administrators and teachers within the district receive their information, training, and continuous learning opportunities. In order to provide for the learning of others, they must first create avenues of learning for themselves through readings and book studies, interactive demonstrations, conference and/or webinar attendance, and sharing during planning meetings. At any given meeting, opportunities for continuous learning provided either the appearance of a communities of practice model (Lave &

Wenger, 1998; Wenger, 2006) or a strictly information delivery model. Within the communities of practice model, members of the group shared a passion for something and the learning that took place as they interacted. In the delivery of information model, topics were merely addressed and information shared with little opportunity for collaboration and reflection. It appeared that the difference in model experienced was a result of the topic or nature of information addressed. For example, investigations into new implementations of RtII or inclusive practices where shared knowledge and experiences would be helpful in planning were supported through the communities of practice model; whereas, district or state initiatives, such as Educator and Administrator Effectiveness, that called for training in specific content were experienced through an information delivery model. Topics found within the document reviews are further discussed below with connections to the themes that emerged.

Also analyzed were documents of meetings that took place as an outcome of a topic or initiative that called for small group or committee work among the administrative team. In these situations, documents demonstrated a greater use of collaborative and/or reflective practices when opportunities for sharing of knowledge or information and discussion regarding initiative planning or decision-making were involved. While the administrative meetings entertained opportunities for learning with an instructional and/or leadership focus where knowledge and skills were shared, the committee work centered in procedural

awareness and information, visioning, and providing leadership and an informed influence to others.

Within the 32 document reviews I conducted during the study window, various topics surfaced and supported the themes of sharing knowledge, enhancing instructional knowledge and practice for self and others, district goals and visioning, collaboration and reflection with others, and influence for others. Technology and district updates that provided an instructional focus existed as well. Administrative effectiveness activities that included a sharing of information and committee work surrounding the state initiative for supervision and evaluation of administrative staff were present. Also witnessed and analyzed were inclusionary practices that focused on procedural information and elements of increasing instructional knowledge and leadership of the initiative in the area of special education. In addition, educator effectiveness and sharing of information regarding the state initiative and supervision of staff were documented. Also evidenced was procedural information relative to the new state laws governing employee and volunteer clearances and background checks required for those working with children in public schools. Finally, the documents reviewed captured and summarized information regarding knowledge of and leadership in many state-mandated and district-required initiatives that included Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtII), Common Core, math curriculum adoption, and inclusionary practices in special education.

In summary and in response to question 1 through the document review, central office administrators experience opportunities for professional development and continuous learning through collaboration and sharing as well as in a direct instructional delivery model. State and district initiatives for implementation provided the forum for learning and sharing of knowledge and practice related to each topic documented and shared above. Themes of sharing knowledge, enhancing instructional knowledge and practice for self and others, district goals and visioning, collaboration and reflection with others, and influence for others emerged in the document review and were substantiated by the examples provided and discussed.

Comprehensive Plan

The District Comprehensive Plan dated 2011-2014 was also analyzed and does not address continuous learning and/or professional development opportunities for its administrative leaders. As a result, no formal or systemic plan existed for central office administrators to experience opportunities for continuous learning and professional development in order to enhance their knowledge of instructional practice and leadership. The newly created Comprehensive Plan for 2015-2018 as mentioned by one respondent in the survey includes strategies and action steps to provide administrators with opportunities for continuous learning and/or professional development but has yet to be initiated in action with any specificity or documentation beyond the references below.

Strategy: Promote a culture of continuous improvement focused on leadership

development, workforce quality and employee engagement by:

- Facilitating leadership development for all administrative staff on an ongoing basis through planned activities and meetings; and
- Providing opportunities for continuous learning and professional development to all staff in support of their specific jobs in the District.

(SESD, 2015)

In summary, question 1 of the study has been answered through the identification of the ways in which central office administrators in this Southeastern School District experienced opportunities for continuous learning and professional development.

Examples of collaborative and reflective practices surfaced through shared discussions and projects, observation, cognitive coaching, journal reading and advanced course work, webinars, book studies, and job-embedded learning and trainings. Examples demonstrated through the document reviews and experiences shared via the survey yielded themes of collaboration and reflection as tied to shared leadership and management of initiatives, decision making processes, visioning, instructional knowledge and focus with reflection on practice, and influence for others. Also discovered and worth citing is the informal nature of all of these activities in the absence of a formally designed and systemic plan as evidenced by its absence in the Comprehensive Plan for the district.

Question 2: How does the district support opportunities for continuous learning and professional development for central office administrators?

Survey Results

District provided and self-directed opportunities for continuous learning and professional development were reported by all 12 survey respondents with responses supporting the themes of sharing of knowledge, collaboration and reflection with others, job-embedded opportunities, and district mission, vision, and goals. Opportunities reported were district administrative and K-12 meetings, conferences and offsite workshops, participation in committee work, groups and task forces, webinars, book studies with individual leaders, and the tuition program for graduate study. While these opportunities were present and facilitated within the district, central office administrators responded overwhelmingly that more could be done to increase opportunities for true learning and professional development in regard to their knowledge of instructional practice and leadership.

COA 1 shared, “We have had very limited professional development to increase our instructional leadership and practice. Much more is needed especially with the PA Core and Educator Effectiveness.” The thought that little is done and more is needed in terms of professional development has been evidenced in the literature (David, 2009) and further supported by another central office administrator who shared,

The district provides central office administrators with updates on initiatives coming out of the state. However, in terms of instructional leadership and practice, little is provided in terms of how to become a better leader. Also, leadership initiatives are often focused on principals rather than central office staff. (COA 7)

Confirming that continuous learning opportunities and professional development existed and were supported, but could be done better was captured in the thoughts and perceptions of central office administrator and respondent five below.

Not as well as it probably could, but time is a limiting factor. We have moved in the direction of trying to use Principals' Meetings, Admin Meetings, and C & I Meetings to provide some amount of administrative professional development. The Leadership Academy in the summer is also used to provide professional development. We are trying with limited success to make these opportunities more collaborative and less 'sit and get'. There are some other PD opportunities during the year on various curriculum, instruction, and assessment topics, as well as PDE mandated programs such as Educator Effectiveness. However, these have tended to be more delivery of information than opportunity to process and collaborate. One big area for improvement is PD on how to LEAD the change, not just the information about the change. (COA 5)

Respondent six echoed the preceding thoughts and offered:

There is very little opportunity for true learning. Most of what is done at the district level is 'faculty' meeting type delivery of content. There have been glimpses of learning opportunities to improve our practice, but very few and far between. In my department meetings, we have opportunities for professional development as a group; some new topic is presented to us in a dedicated period of time. That has been beneficial to my specific area of work. (COA 6)

Finally and in complete support of the problem identified in the study was the thought that little opportunity is provided to grow and prepare central office administrators for instructional leadership and supporting instructional practice, despite the expectations that they lead principals and teachers in professional development activities for increasing student achievement. The following statement supported this:

I would say that the opportunities provided to central office administrators are more ‘trainings’ than true professional development. We have received training on SLOs, Educator Effectiveness and other state mandates. Little is provided in the way of true professional development. Central office administrators are expected to lead professional development activities and to be the ‘experts’ on it, however, we aren’t really developed much. Most development is self-directed through our own studies (doctoral) or seeking out other opportunities. (COA 7)

In summary, the district provides support for continuous learning and professional development opportunities on a limited basis through job-embedded functions and responsibilities. While opportunities are present, administrators shared that the focus was training for state mandates and district initiatives rather than opportunities for true learning and growth as professionals and leaders. Administrators shared that true learning takes place in self-directed ways through collaborative and reflective discussions with colleagues and through their own advanced studies.

Document Reviews

Found within the document reviews was evidence of district support through both formal and informal means. In the formal sense, collegial discourse and interaction during structured weekly meetings of Cabinet and K-12 provide central office administrators with opportunities for continuous learning. Informal interactions and opportunities for continuous learning from peers was found to occur through collaboration and reflection when working in committees or on group projects where department coordination was imperative to the success of the initiative or goal achievement. Examples documented included the Administrator and Educator Effectiveness initiatives as well as the inclusion work that combined the departments and directors of elementary, secondary, special education, and human resources.

The overriding themes that emerged in the document review for this area provided administrators with opportunities in the context of collaboration for shared leadership, visioning, and decision-making. All opportunities for continuous learning were captured in the line of daily work and thus, considered to be job-embedded. No reported activities for purposeful and/or planned professional development to enhance leadership practice were found.

Comprehensive Plan

As indicated previously, the District Comprehensive Plan dated 2011-2014 provided for no formal or informal support of continuous learning and/or professional development opportunities for central office administrators. The

newly created Comprehensive Plan for 2015-2018 indicates support for “facilitating leadership development for all administrative staff on an ongoing basis through planned activities and meetings; and providing opportunities for continuous learning and professional development to all staff in support of their specific jobs in the District.” (SESD, 2015)

From the information summarized, it can be reasoned that question 2 was answered. Central office administrators and information from document reviews and the Comprehensive Plan analysis indicated that continuous learning and professional development opportunities were both provided and supported. However, the effectiveness of those opportunities and the depth to which they assist administrators in true learning and acquisition of knowledge and skills to both lead instructionally and support the practices of others remain in question due to the limited time and the manner in which the opportunities exist. It was suggested through responses and as found in the documents that an overall vision for professional development among central office administrators does not exist and therefore, the purposeful manner in which it could be planned and provided has not been present.

Question 3: In what ways do central office administrators use what they have learned in support of instructional practice in the district?

Survey Results

All 12 respondents suggested that collaborative and reflective practices provided opportunities for continuous growth and a broadening of their understanding for specific topics of study as well as for the application of

knowledge in daily practice. The perception existed that the practices of collaboration and reflection increased their knowledge and skills through the activities of “validation [of thoughts], challenging assumptions, generating multiple paths to explore, causing synthesis, and seeing the big picture as well as the connections” (COA8). Administrators shared that they use knowledge and skills learned to guide and support principals to be effective leaders in schools and to support other members of the administrative team when working on district initiatives. In this way, the themes of shared leadership and the ability to enhance understanding of practice became beneficial outcomes of collaborative and reflective practices. One respondent shared, “I think most of us use what we have learned to guide and support our principals/supervisors to be effective leaders and improve instructional practice” (COA 1). Central office administrators working with principals and supervisors is truly an example of and support for job-embedded practices and the value of realistic and meaningful experiences (Silva, 2015) as a means to continuous learning and professional development opportunities for the purposes of improving instructional practice and influencing student achievement (Marzano & Waters, 2009). It is in this way, that they use their knowledge and experience to guide and influence leadership practices among others for increased leadership capacity within the district.

In addition to sharing knowledge administratively, all responding central office administrators have collaborated with teachers and staff through professional development opportunities. One respondent stated, “As I become

more knowledgeable and improve my leadership skills, these are transferred to others within the organization” (COA 11). Administrators viewed sharing with teachers and incorporating new knowledge into daily practice as important ways in which they use what they learn to support instructional practice. Sharing what is known and learned was also witnessed in setting and supporting the district mission and vision as well as establishing the district goals and objectives to ensure the mission and vision are being realized as shared by one administrator:

In setting priorities, including vision and mission. In establishing goals and objectives for the comprehensive plan as well as for the district and school goals. In professional conversation around the now and next. In reflective and collaborative opportunities with teachers. (COA 8)

Informing practice through cabinet level discussions, formal and/or informal meetings and conversations with teachers and principals, and committee work were also cited as ways central office administrators use what is learned in support of instructional practice and student achievement in the district (Honig & Venkateswaran, 2012). In these ways as well as through opportunities to “apply it to our jobs on a regular basis” (COA 9), central office administrators in the Southeastern District use what is known and has been learned to further both leadership and instructional practice in the hopes of increasing student achievement (DuFour & Marzano, 2011).

In summary of survey responses to question 3, the themes of sharing knowledge, enhancing instructional knowledge and practice for self and others,

job-embedded opportunities, and influence on others emerged. Central office administrators clearly viewed their roles as those of supporting and influencing the growth and practice of others, whether they were principals, teachers, or colleagues on the administrative team. Administrators shared that they use what they have learned on a daily basis to influence the practice of others and to help improve student achievement through increased capacity in our schools.

Document Reviews

Evidence from the document reviews provided examples and understanding of the ways in which central office administrators use what they learn to support instructional practice. Cabinet and K-12 meetings provided witness to the theme of shared leadership among the central office administrators and focused on collaborative planning and decision making processes for district initiatives as well as increasing instructional knowledge and leadership capacity through the yearly Cabinet Retreat and the Administrative Leadership Academy. Through District Administrative Meetings, central office administrators provided instructional focus knowledge to others, deepened awareness and understanding of policy and procedures, and shared information regarding leadership and management as a way of influencing the practice of others.

Curriculum and Instruction documents demonstrated focus on instructional knowledge and process orientation through curriculum, instruction, and assessment work. Major emphasis on using what is learned to provide professional development in preparing staff for new initiatives was evidenced in

curriculum and instruction meetings. While focusing on professional development for the instructional needs of staff, curriculum meetings provided knowledge of instructional practice but lacked discussion regarding professional development of central office administrators and building leaders to strengthen their capacity to lead those practices and the change that often accompanies new initiatives and practices.

As shared above, the document reviews demonstrated the presence of the themes of sharing knowledge, enhancing the instructional knowledge and practice for self and others, collaboration and reflection with others, and influence for others. Examples of these themes were provided through the minutes and action plans from meetings of the Cabinet and Administrative team when planning for the professional development of building principals and teachers regarding state mandates and district level initiatives. The implementation of the RtII, Administrator and Educator Effectiveness, and Inclusionary Practices initiatives in the district called upon central office administrators to use what they have learned in providing professional development to those responsible for facilitating each initiative at the building level.

Comprehensive Plan

Review of the District Comprehensive Plan dated 2011-2014 yielded no information regarding the ways in which central office administrators use what they know to support instructional practice. As previously cited, the newly created Comprehensive Plan for 2015-2018 indicates support for “facilitating leadership

development for all administrative staff on an ongoing basis through planned activities and meetings; and providing opportunities for continuous learning and professional development to all staff in support of their specific jobs in the District” (SESD, 2015). Through these statements, central office administrators receive direction to use what is learned to support all staff in performing at their best.

In summary, question 3, that focused on determining the ways in which central office administrators use what they know and have learned in support of instructional practice has been answered. In survey responses and document reviews, evidence pointed to central office administrators guiding and supporting principals and other administrators to be effective leaders, collaborating with teachers and staff through professional development, setting and supporting the district mission and vision and in so doing, establishing core values for the school district. As referenced above, central office administrators evidence their learning and influence within the school district by incorporating what is known and learned into daily practice.

Evidence of Quality

Credibility or evidence of quality in qualitative research is of utmost importance in validating the interpretive value of the data (Creswell, 2012; Glesne, 2011; Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). Within the context of this study, triangulation and external auditing served as the basis for ensuring and validating the accuracy of the information and interpretation of the survey results

and document reviews. Triangulation, using multiple respondents from various departments within central office and among the several data sources of open-ended surveys, public and private document reviews, and Comprehensive Plan analysis helped to ensure accuracy and credibility (Creswell, 2012). Direct quotes from participants supported accuracy and credibility in the rich descriptions and summary information of question responses and presentation of themes.

Additionally, a colleague in the field served as a peer reviewer (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010; Merriam, 2009) to assist in verifying information and discrepant data while members of the doctoral committee participated as logical reviewers of the data and as such, served as external auditors (Glesne, 2011).

Electronic administration of the open-ended survey tool secured the anonymous collection of data. The district website and intranet resources found within the Administrative Sharepoint provided access to public and private documents as well as The Comprehensive Plan. The Administrative Sharepoint allowed access to planning processes and notes from collaboratively based meetings. Examples of data sources, interpretation, and analysis are found in the appendices.

Conclusions and Outcomes

The purpose of this project study was to investigate the ways in which central office administrators experience opportunities for continuous learning and professional development and the perceptions regarding the effectiveness of those

practices as a vehicle for enhancing their knowledge of instructional leadership and practice. Through the evidence gathered and presented, the ways in which central office administrators experience opportunities for continuous learning and professional development as well as the perceptions of how they use that knowledge in instructional leadership and practice have been determined for the district of study. Survey results, private and public document reviews, and the Comprehensive Plan analysis revealed that collaborative and reflective practices were important to continuous learning and professional development and were ways in which administrators sought to enhance their knowledge of instructional leadership and practice. Administrators shared that while the district provided opportunities on a limited basis through meetings and committee work, each administrator further supported and sought his/her own self-directed means of continuous learning through course work, webinars, and job-embedded opportunities.

Of further significance, as shared through the survey data and confirmed by the document reviews and analysis, were the perceptions of effectiveness and use that this enhanced knowledge had on instructional leadership and practice. Findings suggested that administrators incorporated this knowledge into daily practice in guiding and supporting principals to be effective leaders and teachers in effective instructional practices. Further identified was the effectiveness of this knowledge when shared through professional development and in setting and supporting the district mission and vision and establishing the goals to achieve

them. Through all aspects of data collection, themes of collaboration and reflection, shared leadership and decision-making, sharing of knowledge and enhancing an understanding of practice and influence for others, as well as providing job-embedded opportunities for continuous learning and professional development surfaced as common themes for the district and as illustrated in the literature.

Framed in the survey responses as an area in need of greater focus and support were the provision of an identified purpose and structure for continuous learning and professional development opportunities for the district's central office administrative team. Respondents identified the need for greater time and opportunity to better their craft and enhance their knowledge regarding leadership practice and, specifically, how to lead others in instruction and through aspects of change. The recommendations and planning process for providing central office administrators with professional development opportunities is found within the project in Appendix A. The planning process model provides guidance and a structure for districts seeking to establish a culture of learning for central office administrators in order to enhance knowledge of instructional leadership and practice.

Summary

The selection of a qualitative descriptive case study design (Creswell, 2012; Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtler, 2010) was important in helping to define the experiences and perceived effectiveness of professional development and continuous learning

opportunities as informed logically by the literature review and problem identification. The utilization of these practices as a way to enhance knowledge of instructional leadership and practice was best supported through the administration of an open-ended survey with qualitative analysis and document review, given the position of the researcher within the organization (Fink, 2009). Sorting and coding of data in the analysis process allowed common themes to emerge across all data sources. Analyzing the District Comprehensive Plan, reviewing documents of cabinet, K-12 and administrative meetings, as well as curriculum, instruction, and professional development work in summary of the training and supports provided in addition to the survey results served to triangulate the data and enhance the credibility of the results. The use of thick and rich descriptions of the themes as discovered in the open-ended survey results and the review of documents served as the basis of the findings section as well as the identification of a project as described in the next section.

Section 3 presents the process planning model for providing purposeful and meaningful continuous learning and professional development opportunities to central office administrators as identified as an area of need within the study and supported on a state and national level through the literature. Within the section, the description and goals as well as the rationale, implementation, and evaluation of the plan are detailed. A review of recent literature provides a foundation for the project and implications for social change are developed.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The project, a professional development planning process model for central office administrators, provides a design for continuous learning opportunities as a means to enhancing knowledge of instructional practice and increasing effectiveness regarding instructional leadership. The model provides for the identification of systemic goals for professional development of administrators and the use of differentiated opportunities for continuous learning through the creation of a Professional Learning Community (PLC) for central office leaders. The project model includes detailed steps regarding the creation of an Administrative Professional Learning Community (APLC) and the implementation of differentiated opportunities for continuous learning and professional development. Implementing an administrative level PLC may provide a platform for central office administrators to experience greater collegiality, increased communication, and job-embedded opportunities for collaborative and reflective practices as a means to enhancing their knowledge of instructional and leadership practice.

I created the professional development planning process model from the analysis of data from the Southeastern School District case study involving central office administrators in the suburban district. The organizational structure and components of the model resulted from the recommendations of the data analysis. The process model addresses the need for an identified purpose and structure for continuous learning and professional development opportunities, increased time and opportunity to better one's

craft and enhance knowledge of leadership and practice, and an understanding for a culture of learning within the central office administrative team.

Description and Goals

In an effort to establish and further define opportunities for continuous learning and professional development for central office administrators, I conducted an investigation into the creation of a professional learning community. Emphasis on creating a culture of learning for central office administrators was imperative in response to both the identified problem and the analyzed results of the study. The identified need for greater time and opportunity for administrators to better their craft and enhance their knowledge of instructional leadership and practice became the focus of the project and its main objective. As shared in Section 1 and identified as the problem for the study, the Southeastern School District lacked a formal or systemic plan for central office administrators to experience professional development and continuous learning focused on increasing knowledge of instructional leadership and practice.

In response to the identified problem and the data results as described in Section 2, the project became the creation of an administrative professional development planning process model at the Cabinet Level. The model outlines opportunities and methods to build capacity for instructional leadership and practice among the administrative members of central office. Directed in the model is the creation of an administrative professional learning community in order to increase leadership capacity among its members. The establishment of the planning process model and specifically, the implementation of an administrative professional learning community fosters and

employs collaborative and reflective practices as a means to shared learning through job-embedded opportunities.

Through the analysis of data and reflection upon the recommendations, the goals of the project were developed. The model's first goal became the inclusion of professional development and continuous learning opportunities for administrators within the district's strategic plan. In conjunction with the newly identified strategic plan goal, the second goal of the planning process model established the need for a common understanding and vision for a culture of learning among central office administrators. The final and perhaps most important function or goal of the planning model provided administrators with an identified purpose and structure for continuous learning and professional development opportunities through the creation of an administrative professional learning community. Through the establishment of the planning process model and the realization of each goal within the model, a formal and systemic way of providing for continuous learning and professional development opportunities for central office administrators to enhance their knowledge of instructional leadership and practice exists.

Rationale

The identification of a professional development planning process model for central office administrators was a direct result of the literature, data analysis, and recommendations from the case study involving the Southeastern School District that lacked a formal or systemic way of providing for continuous learning and professional development of its central office administrators. As stated in Section 1, today's

educational administrators are responsible for leading the professional learning communities and supporting the instructional practices of staff that influence student achievement within school districts. For this reason, administrators must be knowledgeable and experienced in the practices of leadership and instruction. The project genre and content were clearly supportive of these needs and targeted specific steps to accomplish the goal of influencing the achievement of students through the work of administrators (DuFour & Marzano, 2011).

Leadership standards for administrators are established at the national, state, and local levels and provide guidance for the behavior and actions of administrators in supporting the teaching and learning process (National Policy Board for Educational Administrators, 2015). The standards represent research and best practice in the field of educational administration and stress the importance of adherence to the guidelines presented for leadership in order to promote improved student learning. Mission, vision, and core values as well as curriculum, instruction, and assessment with a need to continuously build the capacity of all personnel in the school community (NPBEA, 2015) are central focuses in the work of the standards and for that of administrators in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and across the nation. Through the work of the new standards and an understanding of the literature and data results presented in Sections 1 and 2, the genre of the project to provide a professional development planning process model for central office leadership became clear.

In all aspects of their work, central office administrators focus on student learning and achievement and how to promote and support that work (Cosner, 2012). In order to

do so, they must be knowledgeable of the instructional leadership and practices that influence teachers and students in their learning. Creating a planning process to provide opportunities for continuous learning and professional development for central office administrators as key individuals responsible for all learning in the district clearly became the content of the project. The development of goals within the Comprehensive and Strategic Plan was instrumental in assigning value and importance to the need for continuous learning opportunities for those responsible for influencing the learning of teachers and indirectly, that of students (Leithwood et al., 2004). This was also a very important step in beginning the transformation to a culture of learning for all in the district.

Establishing goals and creating a vision (Marzano & Walters, 2009) for a learning culture in which all in the school district would be involved in and influenced by was an important starting point. Significant focus on the creation of an administrative professional learning community within the planning process model was in response to the need for collaborative and reflective practices. Responses by the 12 responding administrators in the survey results and actions summarized in the document reviews when joint work and job-embedded opportunities were cited in minutes of meetings and planning documents substantiated the need. Providing a time, structure, and differentiated opportunities for continuous learning and professional development is meant to give assurance to the goal of enhancing knowledge of instructional leadership and practice through collaboration and reflection involved in joint work (Honig, 2012).

I addressed the problem of the qualitative case study through the genre and content of the project with specific components identified from the literature, data, and recommendations. The professional development process planning model and specifically, the use of collaborative and reflective practices through the administrative professional learning community structure provides opportunity for central office administrators to engage in formal, informal, and job-embedded learning. The project planning process model in its purist form provides focus on learning for those in central office leadership positions and increases opportunities for influencing current practice, which will in turn influence student achievement.

Review of the Literature

Social learning theory, in conjunction with the communities of practice model, served as the theoretical foundation for this study. Instructional leadership, collective and reflective practices, and professional learning and development were topics that resulted from the research in relation to the problem identification. Information gleaned from in-depth study of the research served to evidence the need for an investigation into the ways in which central office administrators experience opportunities for continuous learning and professional development as well as their perceived effectiveness concerning instructional leadership and practice. The content and findings of the research demonstrated the significant need for those in positions of central office leadership to experience opportunities to enhance their knowledge of effective instructional leadership and practice. This evidence yielded the focus for the qualitative case study as designed.

The basis of the project for this qualitative case study was a result of the recommendations from the data analysis shared in Section 2. In order to plan and develop the project solution in response to the data, I conducted a second literature search using peer-reviewed journals and resources from the educational databases of Academic Search, EBSCO, ERIC, Sage, and ProQuest as found in the Walden University Library. The following key words and terms were used to reach saturation: *adult learning, culture of learning, organizational culture, organizational learning, systems thinking, professional learning communities, differentiated professional development, vision, mission, goal setting, central office learning, administrative learning, and district-level learning*. A need for enhanced instructional knowledge and leadership practice as well as trends that emerged from the literature review and supported by the recommendations from the data analysis served as the basis for the following discussion and development of the project. Adult learning theory when combined with social learning theory and the communities of practice model became the lens and conceptual framework by which the literature review was conducted and the project was developed.

Adult Learning Theory

Learning is defined as the process of gaining knowledge and/or expertise (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). The process of learning varies greatly, depending on one's lens as shared in Knowles et al. (2005) survey responses and reported in the findings. Accordingly, there is no best way to learn. Rather, learning most often takes on a very personal focus or individual plan that reflects the learner's goals and objectives as well as his/her preferences and context for learning (Silva, 2015).

The process for learning as an adult considers that learning is not an event, but rather a continuum on which knowledge and experiences are transferred and shared (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Silva, 2015) in a variety of settings and for the purpose of developing competency. According to Knowles et al. (2005), adult learners (a) need to know why they need to learn something, (b) have a self-concept of being responsible for their own decisions, (c) have a need to have their experiences validated in the learning process, and (d) need to be ready to learn or have a context for the learning. Therefore, when working with adults and planning for their learning, it is important to consider their existent knowledge and experiences while also framing a need and context for the learning.

With these concepts in mind and in coordination with the study participant responses shared in Section 2, learning activities for adults should be self-guided and self-directed, value the experiences of the learner, and demonstrate a degree of relevance or sense to the learner and his/her present situation. Accordingly, creating an environment that supports continuous growth for individuals and systems as a whole (Drago-Severson, 2009; Silva, 2015) provides the most optimal lens for learning in the workplace. Employing strategies and practices that focus on powerful adult learning for all in the system can serve to translate into an environment where powerful student learning exists (Erickson, 2010).

Professional learning is not a one-time event, but rather must be ongoing (Balan, Manko, & Phillips, 2011; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Silva, 2015) and include formal and informal learning as well as job-embedded learning as suggested in the data analysis and

recommendations as presented. These forms of ongoing learning opportunities may best be represented through four practices employed by educational administrators and termed *the pillars* by Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano (2013) in their analysis of research involving school leaders, scholars, and practitioners. According to their research, adult learning opportunities can be provided through teaming, sharing leadership roles that create opportunities to learn together, collegial and collaborative inquiry that fosters shared dialogue and reflection in and on practice, and mentoring that builds relationships where mutual growth and benefit are the outcome (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2013; Klinge, 2015; Winkelman, 2012). Survey responses of central office administrative participants substantiated mutual growth and benefit, indicating that practices of the pillars were present and supported in the district, but also in need of improvement in both opportunity and method of delivery. Central office administrator cited experiencing opportunities that included shared leadership and collegial discourse regarding state and district initiatives and shared dialogue with reflection in and on practice during administrative meetings. In these ways, learning opportunities that encourage collaboration and engagement are crafted in the true sense of the adult learner and are of benefit to both the individual and the system as a whole.

The importance of professional development and continuous learning opportunities for adults serving in administrative roles is paramount to effective leadership of teachers and students so that all may achieve new levels of performance and learning (Goldring, Preston, & Huff, 2012). As administrators lead and participate in adult learning opportunities, it is best remembered to plan with a focus on the learners,

their knowledge and experiences as well as their need and context for the learning so that differentiation of activities can speak to how they learn (Hoerr, 2015) and yield the most benefit to the individual and the system. The research is clear; adult learning situations should include the knowledge and expertise that accompany the adult learner with collaborative and reflective practices as the best vehicle.

Vision and Goal Setting

District leadership matters according to Marzano and Waters (2009). Their meta-analysis of 1,210 school districts shared findings that student achievement was positively affected when district leaders were effective in carrying out their responsibilities (Marzano & Waters, 2009). Key responsibilities for district-level administrators, as cited in the research and indicated by respondents in the study, include:

- Creating and communicating with clarity a vision for the school district.
- Ensuring collaborative goal setting in working to achieve the shared vision.
- Establishing nonnegotiable goals for student achievement and classroom instruction.
- Creating school board alignment with and in support of district goals.

In conveying the vision and goals regarding the central mission of teaching and learning in a school district, effective administrators share the core values of practice in clear terms and with compelling force that connects to others in the district, making their vision one that is shared (DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Harris, 2012) and commonly understood. Establishing a shared vision requires leaders who participate in collaborative

dialogue, listening intently to the thoughts and ideas of others while creating a shared sense of ownership and responsibility (Reeves, 2006) for student achievement and the future of the district.

Shared ownership and responsibility for the vision of the school district requires all members within the district to adopt common language (Marzano & Waters, 2009) and understand the role they play in the realization of the vision and goals. District leaders should include all stakeholders within the learning community in developing and establishing the non-negotiable goals by which all in the district will work (Walters, 2012). Of utmost importance is the assurance that the collaborative process results in goals that set expectations for student achievement and instructional practice in the classroom (Marzano & Waters, 2009). In this way, specific and measurable targets for individuals and the district as a whole can be set, understood, and shared. Effective leaders use a shared vision to collaboratively create goals that demonstrate the significance of all people in the district and in so doing, remind individuals of the importance of their contributions in the achievement of the collective goals (DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Katzenbach & Kahn, 2010).

Organizational leaders have the responsibility to ensure that all employees understand the big picture and in turn, demonstrate awareness of the organizational vision and goals in alignment with their position and individual goals (Blakiston, 2011). Central to the ideal of goal alignment is employee understanding of and sharing in the vision of the organization as indicated by respondents in the study. In their mixed-methods study involving 429 educators, Erdem and Ucar (2013) found a significant relationship between

internalization and shared vision and team learning. Educators shared the importance of clearly and accurately stating the objectives of their organization within the shared vision dimension and added an eagerness to participate in activities carried out through teamwork (Erdem & Ucar, 2013). In creating learning organizations, administrators share the responsibility of setting the stage for common understanding and shared visioning for employees to fully engage in and contribute to the success of the goals and achievement of the vision.

Culture of Learning

Employee learning and the establishment of a culture in which learning is supported by all has become the focus of improvement initiatives for many organizations (Casey, 2013; Govaerts & Baert, 2011; Grossman, 2015; Weinstein, 2015) and was referenced as a need for the case study district. This is to say that learning organizations identify the learning of their employees as a key strategic goal (Shipton, Zhou, & Mooi, 2013). Using descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations of the study variables across the 14 countries involved in their study, Shipton et al. (2013) shared results that indicated that the outcomes of being a learning organization are always positive. They further found that learning organizations thrive on the perceived need for change and a mindset that fosters links with consumers of the services on which the organization relies. By focusing on employee learning, organizations actively encourage staff to continually challenge the ways in which they work (Pedler, Burgoyne, & Bydell, 1999). As a result, employee learning and training opportunities become a well-supported investment and serve as the basis for ongoing improvement (Senge, 1990).

Leaders responding to an ever-changing world must be responsive to the needs of their employees in establishing the knowledge and experience to address the challenge of continual change that they face. This was true and apparent in the findings that stated central office administrators sought to use what they learned in providing training, professional development, and influencing the practice of others in response to state and district initiatives. Creating a learning culture or transforming into a learning organization is one way to gain, assimilate, and sustain new knowledge (Blakiston, 2011) in the face of change. In her meta-analysis of librarian culture spanning 20 years of research in the field, Blakiston shared that leaders play a key role in establishing organizational culture and whether learning within an organization is enhanced or hindered. In developing a culture of learning, administrators must encourage staff to seek out new knowledge and promote learning opportunities that allow staff to explore new ideas and concepts. Innovators, risk takers, and those willing to share knowledge with others should be valued and rewarded (Blakiston, 2011).

In building a culture of learning, individuals need to feel as though they are contributing to the work environment and that their knowledge and the resulting work are appreciated. Additionally and in accordance with adult learning theory (Knowles, 2005), individuals need to understand that their new learning and knowledge will be relevant and useful in their work. Creating an organizational culture where continual learning is valued and every experience viewed as an opportunity to learn requires leaders who are understanding of the need and are supportive of the opportunities for staff and employees. The culture of learning is most successful when supported and valued at the

administrative level with those in leadership roles actively engaged in continual learning and professional development opportunities and willing to share their learning with others (Blakiston, 2011). By the very nature of their positions, administrative leaders are role models and contribute to the success of the learning of others when they are willing and able to demonstrate how they use what they know and reward others for doing the same. This concept will serve as a critical component of the administrative professional learning community developed in the project.

A culture of learning consists of a community of workers empowered with a mindset for growth (Grossman, 2015). In cultivating a growth mindset, motivation and specifically, the inner motivation that one possesses is key. Employees should be motivated to increase and enhance their knowledge, learning from formal opportunities as well as one another as they achieve their individual goals and work to advance the goals of the organization. This type of learning in an organization produces an environment of continual improvement where innovation and community building are fostered and organizational performance is enhanced (Teeroovengadum & Teeroovengadum, 2013). Leaders and staff, alike, stand to benefit from an environment where the growth of individuals is the target and the opportunities are fostered through individual and group learning.

Professional Learning Communities

Research has provided a clear and constant message that to be most effective, continuous learning and professional development for educators should be ongoing, collective, job-embedded, results-oriented, and established through the structure of

professional learning communities (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2013; DuFour, 2014; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Silva, 2015). In professional learning communities (PLC), participants share best practices with colleagues and create opportunities to learn from and with others while continuing to improve their own practice (Hoerr, 2009). PLCs function on the premise of student learning and achievement in the presence of a collaborative culture where the continual learning of adults and those involved in the learning of students target improved results for all. Cited as a need in the study district, presented in the findings section, and foundational to effective PLCs and those functioning within their structure is the shared mission, vision, and goals that become the common purpose of the team (Hord & Sommers, 2008). Thus, PLCs provide the structure for a culture of learning that supports continuous learning and professional development through collaboration and adult learning strategies.

In leading system wide change and fostering improvement among all in the school district, central office administrators are required to be knowledgeable of instructional leadership and practice. According to Hansen (2015), “leadership must be steeped in pedagogy” (p. 46) and as a result, “school districts need to invest time and resources in ongoing professional development for administrators” (p.46). One such way is to create professional learning communities at the administrative level so that administrators have a forum and structure to gain knowledge, share experiences, and collaborate and reflect on practices (David, 2009; Hansen, 2015; Honig, 2012). Building capacity among those in leadership positions is the single most important factor in leading school and system-

level improvement that is successful (Harris, 2012) and was shared as a need by respondents in the survey.

Professional learning communities and the opportunities to collaborate and reflect upon practice as provided within their structure may serve central office administrators and leadership teams with the avenue to improve their leadership and practice in order to influence the practice of others within the district. Providing administrators with a learning community structure as a vehicle in which they are able to question, share, and have meaningful conversations regarding instructional leadership and practice is key to their continued development (Chenoweth, 2015) and central to their functioning as successful leaders and change agents. In a case study involving the actions and experiences of two districts, Chenoweth (2015) cited the importance of all principals and central office administrators in understanding the needs of instruction in order to work together to support teacher and student learning through PLCs. Within the research, she identified regular meetings and structured conversations as ways of imparting new information and the implications for change within a system as well as the opportunity to expose existing expertise as a way of strengthening the knowledge and skill of district leaders (Chenoweth, 2015). District leaders, in turn, use their knowledge and skill to influence the practices of others within the district.

Enhanced instructional knowledge and practice is foundational to change and the impact that leaders have on a learning system. Instructional leadership for learning has been strengthened through instructional rounds and collective inquiry as experienced through collaborative discussions similar to those found in PLC structures (Allen,

Roegman, & Hatch, 2015). In their qualitative case study involving 26 superintendents over a period of five years, Allen et al. (2015) shared positive results regarding instructional rounds and the collaborative conversations that took place in small groups and teams. Mentoring and coaching practices among central office administrators have also been demonstrated to be effective when structured through professional learning communities (Frick, Polizzi, & Frick, 2009; Grissom & Harrington, 2010; James-Ward, 2011) as they provide administrators with partnering opportunities to share information and experience and thus, learn from each other. Through many and varied ways, PLCs and the activities sponsored within them at the administrative level hold promise for the enhancement of knowledge in instructional leadership and practice for those in positions of central office leadership.

The content and findings shared within the literature review in this section provided clear and positive evidence of the importance for all in a learning organization to create opportunities and share responsibility for learning. Critical to creating such an environment as demonstrated in the research of Bransford, et al. (2000) and Silva (2015) was an understanding of the ways in which adults learn and the necessary considerations when planning and developing opportunities for adult learning (Knowles, et al., 2005). Studies referenced demonstrated the importance and supported the identified need within the study of developing a culture of learning with value placed on collaborative vision and goal setting for an organization. The concept of professional learning communities (DuFour, 2014; DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008) and communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1998; Wenger, 2006) demonstrated in the studies provided a structure for

employing collaborative and reflective leadership practices when learning new knowledge and sharing experiences in order to enhance the learning and influence the practice of others. The development of an administrative professional learning community (APLC) as a means for collaborative and reflective practices among central office administrators was supported through the theoretical framework of communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1998; Wenger, 2006) and social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) with specific connection to adult learning theory (Knowles, et al., 2005). The evidence provided and the merit of the findings in each of the referenced studies contributed greatly to the development of the professional development planning process model as the study project.

The findings provided an understanding of the ways in which central office administrators learn with value placed on collaborative and reflective practices and the opportunity to use what they learn to influence the practices of others. Central office administrators stated district support for continuous learning and professional development opportunities existed through job-embedded activities and responsibilities. Equally, all respondents shared avenues of self-directed learning through reading, journal articles, graduate courses, webinars, and conferences as well as collaborative and reflective conversations with colleagues. Increased time, the creation of a shared vision and common understanding of a culture of learning, and the development of a structure in which learning could take place for central office administrators were needs identified by respondents and presented in section 2. Analysis of the data and consideration of the findings in concert with research from the literature review and an understanding of the

theoretical frameworks of communities of practice and social learning theory provided direction for the creation of the professional development planning process model detailed in the following section.

Project Description

Implementation

The implementation and evaluation of the professional development planning process model for central office administrators will occur outside of the doctoral project study. Immediately following the conclusion of the doctoral study, the presentation of the project study and results to the superintendent and administrative team in the Southeastern School District will take place. During the project's implementation, participants will follow sequential stages to realize each goal and further their own growth as well as that of the organization. Within each implementation stage and following learning opportunities, participating administrators will provide progress feedback to evidence success and/or need for improvement in various approaches cited in the model.

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

Data collected within the study and information gleaned from the literature review presented in Section 2 suggested the resources and existing supports for the implementation of the project. In the creation of a professional development planning process model, the resources of time and an established structure surfaced as tangible needs and became the focus of the project through the creation of an administrative professional learning community. Administrative meeting time will be designated for the

implementation of the administrative professional learning community. Also suggested was a survey instrument to identify the necessary content of interest and need from central office administrators. As a result, I created a survey instrument aligned with the leadership standards and framework in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for use in the project.

Current personnel with years of experience in their roles will serve as existing resources and supports in sharing knowledge and transforming structures to enhance their effectiveness in providing opportunities for continuous learning and professional development. Identified in the data analysis were structures of administrative meetings, joint projects, and daily operations that with improved focus and adherence to a common vision will serve as vehicles and opportunities for administrators to collaborate and reflect on practice. Job-embedded opportunities will be available through state and district-level initiatives that require collaboration across departments for their implementation. In each of these situations, the opportunity for continuous learning and professional development exists.

Potential Barriers

While the need for a formal or systemic plan for professional development involving central office administrators was something identified by administrators within the district, potential barriers to the project's implementation could present as lack of priority or support for the time commitment necessary to implement. Work demands and schedules often dictate and shape individuals' ability to participate in additional activities or those considered assistive in nature (Honig, 2012). From this perspective, positional

authority and the support of the superintendent in providing a clear vision and message of the importance of such activity in building capacity among the leadership team may be necessary. Accordingly, the superintendent may need to limit the number of initiatives each year to provide the time necessary for leaders to engage in the defined collaborative and reflective practices of the plan (Marzano & Waters, 2009). In this way, administrators may realize the ability to implement the model as a focused goal rather than an added responsibility.

Another important variable and potential barrier to consider might be the changes or turnover in administrative staff at the central office level that often occurs in school districts. Changes in staff, if frequent in nature, could produce challenges for the assistant relationships (Honig, 2012) that are necessary to the success of collaborative and reflective practices within the administrative professional learning community. For this reason, administrators should annually revisit conversations regarding norm development and protocols for interacting with colleagues when in the APLC environment and other assisting relationships. With careful consideration and skillful facilitation of the assistant relationships, school districts and specifically, central office administrators have the potential to be successful in carrying out the planning process model for professional development through an administrative professional learning community as found in Appendix A.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

Administrators in the study district and region work 12 months of the year, which will allow implementation of the plan immediately after the completion of the doctoral

project study. Due to the ongoing nature of continuous learning and professional development in response to district needs and state or national initiatives, learning opportunities will be ever changing and ongoing. The project's implementation will be monitored with its success measured by the point at which the actions of the plan become a natural component of the learning culture within the district.

During the initial phase and scheduled during the annual Cabinet Retreat in early July, I will present a summary of the study and recommendations along with the plan outline to the superintendent and his cabinet. Through cabinet meetings during the remainder of the summer, the superintendent and I will focus on creating foundational knowledge and understanding for the structure and work of an administrative professional learning community and a culture of learning among the team. Important to this work will be adherence to meeting schedules, creation of group norms, and identification of topics and opportunities for new learning.

Beginning in September and throughout the course of the calendar year through June, the cabinet members will reserve monthly meeting time for engaging in collaborative and reflective practices to coordinate their learning and work as leaders in the district. Support for instructional leadership and practice will occur in real time and be associated to job-embedded practices (Silva, 2015) to address district and state initiatives while supporting the teaching and learning process. Differentiated opportunities and varied methods of professional development exist within the planning process model in response to the district and state determined needs and the leaders involved.

In subsequent months and entering into the next phase of implementation, cabinet members will share their learning and experiences with other central office level administrators within their departments. This sharing would be present in the form collegial dialogue and discourse, collaborative inquiry, modeling, mentoring, and joint work in response to district and state initiatives and the support needs of building level administrators and teachers. Evaluations and feedback of learning opportunities and experiences would be ongoing throughout the first year.

The final stage of implementation would include a review and analysis of the success experienced by the Southeastern District and a sharing of the planning process model with other school districts across the county. During year two of implementation, regional superintendents and directors of professional development will receive the planning process model as published in Appendix A via the local intermediate unit at monthly meetings of like professionals. Sharing in this fashion offers opportunity and contributes to the model's wider acceptance in the educational field.

Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others

The roles and responsibilities of the student and member of the team of central office administrators will be participatory and facilitative in nature. As a first step, I will share a summary of the study and recommendations along with the plan for professional development with the superintendent and his cabinet level administrators. During this initial phase, I will assist the superintendent in facilitating discussion and establishing a common understanding of the model as well as a commitment from all members to support its implementation. Since the superintendent directs the actions of the cabinet

level administrators and has facilitator responsibilities for the schedule and structure of cabinet meetings, I will also assist the superintendent as the model implementation progresses and the administrative professional learning community develops. I will provide continued assistance to the superintendent and other members of the cabinet as they begin to work with their departments and other central office administrators to participate in collaborative and reflective practices for enhanced learning and knowledge of instructional leadership and practice within the school district.

The development of the planning process model includes many levels of differentiation and takes into account the varying needs of administrators in response to their own knowledge and skill level regarding instructional leadership and practice as well as content information for newly introduced initiatives in any given year. Evaluation of the project model will include all members of the superintendent's cabinet and the central office administrative team as well as the building level leaders with whom they work and support. Being a cabinet member and one of the lead administrators in the district, I will remain ever involved in meeting the challenges and experiencing the successes of the professional development planning process model for central office administrators in the district. Each year's evaluation of progress will guide the direction of future years' needs and opportunities.

Project Evaluation

In determining the success of this project and specifically that of the professional development planning model, administrators will need to consider the expected outcomes as well as the processes executed to achieve them (Goldring, Preston, & Huff, 2012).

Providing central office administrators with continuous learning and professional development opportunities to enhance their knowledge of instructional leadership and practice is the expectation for the project study. Therefore, the ultimate goal and natural outcome of the project rests with the ability of knowledgeable administrators to influence the practices of others and thereby, increase the achievement of students. With this in mind, an outcomes-based evaluation approach is best suited to determine the level of success achieved by the project.

In order to determine the impact of professional development on individual leaders, participants will use self-report professional development evaluation forms, as found within the project and Appendix A, following continuous learning opportunities. In addition and in order to realize the impact of instructional leadership and practice on building level leaders and teachers, a survey of those influenced by central office leaders will be conducted on an annual basis as part of the districts feedback survey as referenced in Section 1. Additional components of the project's evaluation will include daily logs (Camburn, Spillane, & Sebastian, 2010) during two identified times in the year: mid-year and end of year. The logs will require central office administrators to provide entries summarizing the ways in which they have used what they learned in support of instructional leadership and practice when working with principals and other central office administrators to influence student achievement.

A final view of formative assessment methods in the project's evaluation would include the central office administrator's performance evaluation and the connection to the leadership standards that it provides. Discussion and evidence witnessed in each

domain on the leader's evaluation will assist in demonstrating the degree to which the continuous learning and professional development opportunities assisted in the instructional leadership and practice of the central office administrator. A final and summative measure of the success of the model will be a review of student achievement scores and a comparison of results from the previous year to the present for insight into the indirect influence to student achievement that leaders provide (Leithwood, et al., 2004).

Formative and summative measures will evidence success in implementation and effect. Those areas demonstrating success at 75% levels or better will continue in subsequent stages and years, whereas those with lower reported success rates will be reviewed for their level of impact and future use. Cabinet members will share success measures for discussion and further consideration regarding future use. Successful measures will continue in their current state, whereas questionable measures will undergo revision to meet the changing methods of professional development in the iterative process of improvement.

Implications Including Social Change

Local Community

This project was significant for the Southeastern School District as a result of its focus on the specific needs for continuous learning and professional development opportunities for the central office administrators as determined through the research and data analysis. As indicated in Section 1 through the problem identification, the district

lacked a formal or systemic plan for professional development of its central office administrators. Research and data analysis in Section 2 reported the need for central office administrators to share a common understanding and vision for a culture of learning in the district and to experience time and opportunity to enhance their knowledge of instructional leadership and practice. Through the implementation of a professional development planning model and the support given through the district's Comprehensive and Strategic Plan goal, central office administrators will be provided opportunities to not only experience new learning, but to also collaborate and reflect on its influence in their daily practice with colleagues, teachers, and students. The development of an administrative professional learning community has the potential to affect the instructional learning and practice of central office administrators and in turn, influence the learning of all stakeholders within the organization. By experiencing increased opportunities to enhance their own learning in the areas of instructional leadership and practice, central office administrators in this district and across the Commonwealth may show great promise in supporting improvement in teaching and learning and ultimately, the achievement of students (Honig, 2012).

Social Change

Social change as defined by Walden includes academic leadership in theory and practice to “promote the worth, dignity, and development of individuals, communities, organizations, institutions, cultures, and societies” (Walden, 2010, p. 5). The lack of a formal or systemic plan for continuous learning and professional development opportunities for central office administrators in the field of education has the potential to

minimize professional growth for individuals and organizations. In the absence of a common vision, formalized opportunities and structured time to engage in them, central office administrators are denied the benefit of collaborative and reflective practices shared with colleagues and designed to enhance the learning and knowledge of administrators and influence the practices of all in the organization. However, when engaging components of social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) and cultivating a mindset of growth (Grossman, 2015) within the leadership team and the whole of the organization, learning becomes intrinsic and motivational. Learning that influences leadership and practice becomes interwoven in the fabric of the mission and vision of the organization. With enhanced knowledge of instructional leadership and practice, leaders may address the many issues facing education today, begin to influence the practices of all in the field, and by so doing, begin to effect the achievement of students at the local, state, and national levels.

Far-Reaching

The knowledge and information gleaned from this project study and the creation of administrative level professional learning communities will serve as a guide and template of practice for other school districts presented with similar needs and concerns for continuous learning and professional development opportunities among central office administrators within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and across the United States. As supported in the literature, those in leadership positions often lack knowledge and experience in establishing opportunities for their own professional growth and development (Schlachter, 2013). Administrators and educational leaders in other districts

who experience similar concerns might benefit from the knowledge of the recommendations and use of the professional development plan of this study. By establishing formalized professional development plans for leaders at the highest level in our educational organizations, central office administrators provide a vision and support for a culture of learning within their districts. By doing so, the achievement of students becomes an outcome of the learning of all, for as the adults learn so too do the students (DuFour & DuFour, 2006; Erickson, 2010; Hirsh & Killion, 2009).

Conclusion

The professional development planning process model provides a structure for offering continuous learning and professional development opportunities to central office administrators. As a response to the needs identified in the Southeastern School District, the model established goals for inclusion in the district's Comprehensive and Strategic Plan, the development of a common understanding of a culture of learning in the district, and the provision of time and a structure for central office administrators to experience continuous learning and professional development opportunities. The planning process model materialized from information learned within the second literature review and in direct response to the data as compiled and analyzed in the qualitative case study involving 18 central office administrators within the Southeastern School District of study.

Section 3 included information regarding the project's description and goals, its rationale, and a second literature review in addition to the implementation process which detailed potential resources and existing supports, potential barriers, the timeline, and

roles and responsibilities to be considered. The project evaluation and important aspects of social change for the local community and other far-reaching circles have also been considered and shared in this section.

Section 4 provides the reader with a discussion of the project strengths, limitations, and suggestions for remediation. Through great reflection, aspects of scholarship, leadership, and change are addressed as well as sharing what has been learned through an analysis of myself as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer. Finally, the project's potential impact on social change, implications, applications, and directions for future research are captured.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the ways in which central office administrators experience opportunities for continuous learning and professional development and their perceptions regarding the effectiveness of those opportunities in enhancing knowledge of effective instructional leadership and practice. In this final section, I reflect upon the work of the study and share insights regarding the project's strengths and limitations as well as the learning experienced as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I will share thoughts regarding the project's impact on social change and the implications for future study.

The project study was designed and created in response to the lack of a formal or systemic plan for central office administrators to experience professional development and continuous learning opportunities focused on increasing knowledge of instructional leadership and practice. The study focus was a result of the needs demonstrated in the survey information (SESD, 2011) and personal communication with members of the administrative team (Administrative Cabinet, personal communications, 2011). Rationale for the study was gleaned from literature in the field regarding leadership and its indirect influence on student achievement (Honig, 2012; Leithwood, et al., 2004; Marzano & Waters, 2009) and survey information from the district of study (SESD, 2011). The research question guiding the study was: In what ways do central office administrators experience professional development and continuous learning opportunities in order to enhance their knowledge of instructional leadership and practice within the district and

what are their perceptions regarding the effectiveness of those practices? Within the qualitative descriptive case study design, an open-ended survey sent anonymously to 18 participants, review of 32 public and private documents, and an analysis of the Comprehensive Plan were the vehicles for data collection. Data were triangulated, analyzed, and coded for themes (Creswell, 2009), as presented in Section 2. The research question and subquestions of the study were answered with the information serving to provide direction for the project as presented in Section 3.

Project Strengths

The strength of the project begins with the deliberate and systemic focus that the newly revised goals within the Comprehensive and Strategic Plan provide. As an extension of these goals, the collaboratively developed and commonly understood vision for a culture of learning within the school district supports the need for all members of the district to be in a learning mindset. These two aspects alone support the idea that when adults learn, students learn (DuFour & DuFour, 2006; Erickson, 2010; Hirsh & Killion, 2009).

The ultimate strength of the project lies in the creation of an administrative professional learning community that will provide a vehicle for continuous learning and professional development opportunities while employing collaborative and reflective practices. Scheduled into monthly cabinet and administrative meetings, this structure will provide opportunity for central office administrators to share knowledge and experiences in collaborative and supportive environments with those who share similar leadership roles and needs for enhanced knowledge of instructional leadership and practice as

defined in the problem. This structure will provide for ongoing opportunities as emphasized in the research and serve to ensure consistency of practice among leaders providing support to buildings. In this way, all in district-level leaders will share similar practices that support the learning and sharing of new knowledge as well as influencing strategies for effective instructional leadership and practice.

The established norms and specific parameters of professional learning communities will assist the central office administrators and the district as a whole to understand and follow a common vision to achieve the mission of the school district. The administrative level professional learning community will contribute to the learning of all through shared practice and will contribute to the growth and transformation of the school district as a learning organization. Through the implementation of this project, the district of study will have a defined community structure supported by the work of Lave and Wenger (1998) and DuFour (2014) to support the enhancement of knowledge for effective instructional leadership and practice. The project, if expanded to districts beyond the Southeastern District of study, will have the potential to influence practices of other central office and district-level administrators and as a result contribute to positive social change within the field of education.

Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations

A perceived limitation of the project exists because of data secured from a relatively small research sample and focused on the needs of one district in particular. The understanding that the focus district is one of the largest in the Commonwealth, ranking seventh out of five hundred and as a result, supported by a larger and more

comprehensive administrative team and organizational structure than most other districts may mitigate the concern. Additional consideration for remediating this particular concern is the support provided by the literature and citing the identified problem as a global concern that could benefit from further research.

When considering the project in response to the identified district's problem, a major limitation of the project is a commitment from the superintendent (Horton & Martin, 2013) and central office administrators for time. Time is needed to develop and sustain a systemic culture of learning in the district. Time is required for weekly and monthly meetings for the development of the administrative professional learning community. In responding to the need for increased time, the project calls for the use of existing meeting time with a streamlining of topics and a focus on greater efficiency so as to provide the needed time for collaborative and reflective practices within the establishment of the administrative professional learning community. As an additional consideration to remedy the limitation of time, districts should consider using job-embedded opportunities (Silva, 2015; Honig, 2012) that provide for collaborative and reflective practices within one's normal leadership responsibilities.

I considered alternative approaches to the project, which included costly leadership training programs that would require time away from the district and the administrators' general leadership responsibilities. Investigation into these programs revealed general content of leadership strategy and practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Larsen, 2003; Schachter, 2013) but lacked specificity to district initiatives. The professional development planning process model as defined in the project was the best

solution to address the concerns for a systemic plan with a focus on district-specific needs for enhanced instructional leadership and practice, while at the same time being general enough to translate into use in other school districts.

Scholarship

When reflecting upon scholarship, I think of the processes of researching and teaching as well as the integration and application of knowledge (Kanuka, 2011) to contribute to the field of study. Scholarship is a commitment to discovery and sharing of new learning and the application of new knowledge. In this regard, and through this project study, I have experienced scholarship. Identifying original research with the hopes of building upon prior research, framing a concept in a theoretical base, and qualitatively discovering new knowledge, I have put into practice the essence of scholarship (Kanuka, 2011). Through the implementation of the project study and the creation of the professional development planning process model, a framework for continuous learning and professional development exists for central office administrators.

As the district of study initiates the implementation of a professional learning community for its administrative team, opportunities for collaboration and reflection on and about practice will exist. These opportunities will serve to advance the knowledge on which decisions are made and improvement is noted. Using research and peer-reviewed studies have become a part of the evidence I use on a daily basis in my work life and when shared with others, serve as a way to positively influence leadership and learning within our organization.

Project Development and Evaluation

Project development and evaluation are outcomes of the need to respond to an identified problem as substantiated by research or data. The development of a project and its evaluation method are best evidenced by its potential or the strength of and limitations to its success and influenced by the knowledge and experience of the people involved. In this regard, I learned the importance of truly identifying a problem, investigating the concern, and developing the potential resolve. Planning the professional development project required knowledge of a planning framework and the development of a timeline. Crucial to the success of any project are the involvement of all stakeholders and the identification of performance indicators as a method for monitoring the implementation progress and ultimate success.

Embedded in this planning process was the collection of data in substantiation of the problem identification, which led to the formulation of possible project themes. Suggestions gleaned from the data provided information and ideas to be included in the project development, identified to be a formal planning process model for providing continuous learning and professional development opportunities to central office administrators in the district of study. Stakeholder input was provided through the open-ended surveys with further involvement defined in the implementation of the plan and creation of collaborative and reflective practices as experienced within the administrative professional learning community. The implementation of the model may foster additional insight and experience for future implementations as the model is shared with others in the field of education.

Leadership and Change

The research and literature shared in Section 1 demonstrated the shift of educational administrators in recent years from that of operational managers to instructional leaders with a focus on improving student achievement (Edmonds, 1979; Hallinger and Murphy, 1986; Leithwood, et al., 2004). Data findings shared in Section 2 evidenced the expectations placed upon leaders to influence the work of others and specifically, teachers in improving student achievement with no formal plan for providing continuous learning and professional development opportunities for administrators to learn how to influence necessary change. According to Hoerr (2005), “Good leaders change organizations; great leaders change people” and “leadership is about relationships” (p. 7). It is about the ability to guide and support others through thought and action. It is the ability to influence, persuade, and inspire others to achieve the common goals of the mission, vision, and core values as developed and shared within the school district. Leadership can be transformational in nature and as a result, creates a platform for change in organizations focused on continuous improvement.

Leadership at a superintendent and cabinet level is instrumental in setting the mission, vision, and core values of the district (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). Equally important is the support given to those involved in carrying out these beliefs in their daily work. I have learned the true importance of establishing, communicating, and practicing in word and action the mission, vision, and core values of an organization. In this learning, value exists in the beliefs shared in transformational leadership (Burns, 1978) and the collaborative and reflective practices that provide avenues for sharing knowledge

and experience to foster a learning environment where individuals embrace change as a positive aspect of learning for all.

Analysis of Self as Scholar

Intensive research and study through coursework and during the development of the project study have provided greater insight into the importance of scholarly research and writing. I believe I have always understood the need and use of peer related resources from my work at the university level, but have truly come to realize its value in the development of a theoretical framework to identify and address a problem. Through the development of this project study, my desire to learn, grow, and influence the practice of instructional leadership in the field of education has increased significantly. The processes used to access and review research and literature have influenced the way in which I view an issue and reflect upon its resolve. The process has taught me the value of embedding research with the knowledge and experience of others through collaborative dialogue and reflection when considering problems, solutions, and daily practices to improve instruction and my effectiveness as a leader and practitioner.

Analysis of Self as Practitioner

In the true spirit and meaning of collaboration and reflection as supported by adult learning theory, I have sought to learn from others in my daily life and throughout this doctoral journey. Seeking input from peers through questioning and observation has emphasized and reaffirmed the need for and benefit of collaborative practices in leadership. By employing collaborative practices and reflection in my daily work, I have placed value on the idea of continuous improvement and the impact of that message on

the activities associated with life-long learning for others and myself. Through continuous learning and professional development opportunities, I can hope to influence the practices of my leadership and those of others for the betterment of our organization and the field of education.

Analysis of Self as Project Developer

As a scholar and practitioner, I have learned a great deal during this doctoral journey and certainly in the area of project development. As with most tasks in life, the lens we bring to the development of a process or project is reflective of our knowledge and experience in the field. In the role of project developer, I have discovered the skills of researching and assimilating new knowledge in formulating a solution to be an asset. Having knowledge of and passion for continuous learning opportunities as well as experience as an educational administrator were very helpful in the process of developing the project.

Through the various stages of the study, I further developed my research skills, which contributed greatly to identifying component parts of the project. Communication skills have always been a strength of mine and were truly needed throughout this project study and planning process model development. Interactions with colleagues throughout the study were comfortable and futuristically as we implement the project will most likely be strengthened by our relationships and what has been learned collaboratively about our district. Positive relationships and common understanding of practice is truly important to the success of any change as brought about through the development of a project.

As I reflect further, I share a great sense of pride and accomplishment for the work achieved thus far both individually and with colleagues in the district as a result of this study and project. The vision for the future would entail success with the implementation in the district of study as well as other districts that may choose to adopt the project model within their administrative team. The journey has been a very challenging but also extremely rewarding experience that has fostered much growth for me as a person and administrator. I will use the knowledge gained along the way in assistance relationships with others to influence the work of the future.

The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change

The study, a qualitative case study exploration of the continuous learning and professional development opportunities of central office administrators and the resulting project plan served to lessen the gap in literature and practice. Through open-ended survey response, Comprehensive and Strategic Plan analysis, and document reviews, I learned much regarding the current state and anticipated benefit of collaborative and reflective practices as forms of learning for central office administrators. Reflecting on the topic that so interested me, I have also found it to be one of great need for further research and study to benefit not only the district of study, but also others in the field. Creating a culture of learning and valuing professional development on a systemic level were the goals set and through the development of the project, have taken root. As shared earlier, learning becomes intrinsic and motivational when an aspect of growth and the opportunity to work with colleagues are incorporated into the practices (Grossman, 2015; Silva, 2015).

Learning that influences leadership and practice at a systems' level has the ability to support district-wide improvement in teaching and learning (Honig, 2012), where leadership influence gives way to student achievement as the ultimate benefit and accomplishment. In a system where learning is the focus, all involved in the organization are engaged in improvement through the acquisition of new knowledge and reflection in and on practice (Schön, 1987) to spark growth as individuals and the organization as a whole. Through shared learning opportunities, enhanced knowledge of instructional leadership and practice can be realized for central office administrators responsible for supporting learning within the organization. Through increased growth and collective capacity among central office leaders, districts will be better equipped with personnel who are knowledgeable and capable of addressing the many issues facing education today. By creating assistance relationships through collaborative and reflective practices, educational leaders will have the capacity to influence the practices of all in the field and as a result, affect the instructional practices of teachers and the achievement of students at the local and state levels.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Establishing an administrative professional learning community to provide continuous learning and professional development opportunities for central office administrators is crucial to their individual growth within systems and their collective growth as colleagues faced with today's educational challenges. Fostering opportunities for leaders to experience formal, informal, and job-embedded learning (Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Silva, 2015) is critical to maintaining a focus for learning for all and certainly

provides implications for the ways in which they influence the learning and practice of others. This study suggested the need for central office administrators to share a common understanding and vision for a culture of learning in the district and to experience time and opportunity to enhance their knowledge of instructional leadership and practice.

Based upon the literature, data, and recommendations shared regarding current needs, a planning process model for professional development was created as an application of that knowledge for future impact. While focused on the continuous learning needs of central office administrators, the model may be easily adapted to provide opportunities for others in leadership positions within school districts. Focusing on collaborative and reflective practices and the creation of an administrative professional learning community, the model may also serve the needs of others in leadership positions within school districts. The planning process model serves as a resource for all in education who seek professional development and continuous learning opportunities and specifically, collaborative and reflective practice opportunities when participating in joint work and sharing the collective responsibility for the achievement of teachers and students.

Future research might include investigations of assistance relationships and job-embedded supports for central office administrators as they shift from traditional roles as managers of processes to leaders of instructional practice. While this study focused on the roles and supports needed for central office administrators in enhancing their knowledge of instructional leadership and practice, further study and research may also be warranted regarding similar levels of support for building-level leadership and their connectedness

to central office leaders. The findings from this study provide future researchers with a starting point in terms of assistance relationships across levels in a learning organization and specifically, the interconnectedness of central office administrators to building level leaders and ultimately to their influence on teachers and students.

This study focused on the collaborative and reflective practices used in providing continuous learning and professional development opportunities to central office administrators. Qualitative research involved using an open-ended survey, plan analysis, and document reviews due to my position in the school district. Suggestions for future research include in-depth interviews of participants with shadowing and observations of practice opportunities over time to further determine the ways in which leaders contribute to and influence the learning of others in the district. Continuing in the tradition of rich descriptive analysis as found in qualitative research will allow others an understanding of the in-depth experiences and needs of all leaders within our school systems.

Conclusion

Within this section of reflections and conclusions, much has been shared regarding the strengths and limitations of the project as well as the significant amount of learning that took place on the part of the researcher as scholar and practitioner. Implications, applications, and directions for future study have been discussed in addition to the project's potential impact on social change, which is considered the greatest contribution of this project study. An executive summary of the study along with the project, a professional development planning process model for central office administrators exists in Appendix A. The professional development planning process

model speaks to the need for central office administrators to experience situations of continuous learning with opportunities for enhanced knowledge of instructional leadership and practice. The model is responsive to the data findings as shared in section 2 and calls upon the need for a shared vision (DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Harris, 2012), a culture of learning (Blakiston, 2011), and differentiated opportunities as provided through the creation of an administrative level professional learning community (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2013; DuFour, 2014; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Silva, 2015).

Presented in the literature at the national and state level and identified as a need at the local level, the problem addressed in the project study was the lack of formal and systemic planning for continuous learning and professional development of central office administrators. Because of district leaders' direct influence on building level leadership and indirect influence on instructional practice and student achievement, the problem affects stakeholders within the school district of study and across the state and nation in districts that lack plans for increasing leadership capacity (Horton & Martin, 2013). In considering the gap in literature and practice, this project study was designed to explore the ways in which 18 central office administrators experience continuous learning and professional development opportunities in order to enhance knowledge of effective instructional leadership and practice.

The selection of a qualitative descriptive case study design (Creswell, 2012; Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010) came after careful consideration of the problem and was important in helping to define the experiences and perceived effectiveness of professional development and continuous learning opportunities. The case study design

derived logically from the literature review and identified problem. The questions embedded in the design examined the ways in which district level administrators experience continuous learning opportunities, understand the perceptions regarding the effectiveness of those practices, and identify recommendations for enhancing their knowledge of instructional leadership and practice. Results and findings provided evidence of the project study's success in responding to the research question.

The constructivist view and specifically, that of social learning theory in conjunction with the communities of practice model provided the theoretical framework for this study and combined with adult learning theory to direct the project development. Because of their direct and indirect influence on student achievement and a lack of systemic professional development, administrators have been encouraged to engage in joint work opportunities. In so doing they focus their energies on the creation of a collegial community that is rooted in collaborative and reflective practice for the purposes of continuous learning (David, 2009) and the building of leadership capacity.

The strengths of the project include the systemic focus provided by goals embedded within the district's Comprehensive and Strategic Plan, the collaboratively developed and commonly understood vision for a culture of learning, and the creation of an administrative professional learning community that will provide a vehicle for continuous learning and professional development opportunities while employing collaborative and reflective practices. Despite the project's strengths, limitations exist and serve to set the direction for further study and research. Future research and study should encompass the area of assistance relationships and job-embedded supports for central

office administrators as they shift from traditional roles as managers of processes to leaders of instructional practice.

The professional development planning process model emerged from results derived from data and recommendations as provided from a relatively small sample size. Alternative solutions to the project were considered and included costly leadership training programs that would require time away from the district and the administrators' general leadership responsibilities. The professional development model as defined in the project was the best solution to address the concerns for a systemic plan with a focus on district-specific needs for enhanced instructional leadership and practice, while at the same time being general enough to translate into use in other districts. Providing a comprehensive resolve to the lack of formal and systemic professional development for central office administrators as witnessed in the literature in school districts at the state and national level, the model presents a much-needed planning process for leadership teams across districts and states.

Through the implementation of this project for professional development among central office administrators, the district of study will have a defined structure to support the enhancement of knowledge for effective instructional leadership and practice. The project, if expanded to districts across the county and state, has the extreme potential to influence instructional leadership and practice of other central office and district-level administrators. In this regard, it holds great promise as a positive aspect of social change within the field of education.

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Appendix A: Executive Summary & Project

Foundational Information

This executive summary has been prepared for the superintendent of schools and members of the Cabinet in the Southeastern School District of study. It is the direct result of a doctoral project study recently completed by Cheryl McCue as part of her doctoral degree from Walden University. Contained within the summary is information specific to the identification of the research problem and recommendations for its resolve as determined through the work of the project study.

The problem identified and addressed in the project study was the lack of formal and systemic planning for continuous learning and professional development of central office administrators in the case study district. Literature at the national and state level as well as personal communication with central office administrators and school district survey data (SESD, 2011) at the local level supported the need. Because of district leaders' direct influence on building level leadership and indirect influence on instructional practice and student achievement, the problem affects stakeholders within the school district of study and across the state and nation in districts that lack plans for increasing leadership capacity (Horton & Martin, 2013). In considering the gap in literature and practice, this project study was designed to explore the ways in which central office administrators experience continuous learning and professional development opportunities in order to enhance knowledge of effective instructional leadership and practice.

The selection of a qualitative descriptive case study design (Creswell, 2012; Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010) came after careful consideration of the problem and it was important in helping to define the experiences and perceived effectiveness of professional development and continuous learning opportunities. The design was derived logically from the literature review and the identified problem. The study included open-ended survey questions sent to central office administrators anonymously via Survey-Monkey and review of public documents as well as those considered private and stored on the administrative Sharepoint in the district and related to administrative functions. The goals embedded in the design examined the ways in which district level administrators experienced continuous learning opportunities, understood the perceptions regarding the effectiveness of those practices, and identified recommendations for enhancing their knowledge of instructional leadership and practice. Results and findings provided evidence of the project study's success in responding to the research question.

Analysis and Findings

Charged with the mission, vision, and responsibilities for forward movement of the district, central office administrators indicated in the Survey Monkey and related documents findings that the district lacked a formal plan for systemic professional development focused on increasing their knowledge of instructional practice and enhancing their instructional leadership. Surveying central office administrators, conducting document reviews, and analyzing the Comprehensive Plan in the district has led to greater understanding of the lack of a systemic plan for continuous learning and professional development as well as personal experiences and perceptions of the

administrators. Findings supported the thought that collaborative and reflective practices serve as meaningful ways for central office administrators to experience continuous learning and professional development opportunities in order to enhance their knowledge of instructional leadership and practice. While some levels of collaborative and reflective practices were found to be present in job-embedded functions and supported by the district through administrative meetings, committee work, and specific goal projects, the findings pointed to a need for greater time, a systemic structure, and the development of a culture of learning among central office administrators.

Question 1 of the study sought to discover information regarding the ways in which central office administrators experience opportunities for continuous learning and professional development in order to increase their knowledge of instructional leadership and practice. Question 2 considered how the district supports opportunities for continuous learning and professional development for central office administrators. Question 3 of the study inquired about the ways in which central office administrators use what they have learned in support of instructional practice and leadership in the district. A communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1998) lens combined with social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) provided the theoretical framework through which the information was reviewed and shared.

Question 1 of the study has been answered through the identification of the ways in which central office administrators in the Southeastern School District experience opportunities for continuous learning and professional development. According to the collected data, participants knew of and understood collaborative and reflective practices

as they related to their own learning and that of colleagues. Examples provided included shared discussions and projects, observation, cognitive coaching, journal reading and advanced course work, webinars, book studies, and job-embedded learning and trainings. Examples demonstrated through the document reviews and experiences shared via the survey yielded themes of collaboration and reflection as tied to shared leadership and management of initiatives, decision making processes, visioning, instructional knowledge and focus with reflection on practice, and influence for others. Also discovered and worth citing is the informal nature of all of these activities in the absence of a formally designed and systemic plan as evidenced by its absence in the Strategic and Comprehensive Plan for the district.

The goal of Question 2 in determining the ways in which the district provided and supported continuous learning and professional development opportunities for central office administrators was accomplished. Central office administrators and information from document reviews and the Strategic and Comprehensive Plan analysis indicated that the district provided and supported continuous learning and professional development opportunities. However, the effectiveness of those opportunities and the depth to which they assist administrators in true learning and acquisition of knowledge and skills to both lead instructionally and support the practices of others remain in question due to the limited time and the manner in which the opportunities exist. Evidence in participant responses and as found in the documents suggested that an overall vision for professional development among central office administrators does not exist and therefore, the purposeful manner in which it could be planned and provided has not been present.

Question 3 focused on determining the ways in which central office administrators use what they know and have learned in support of instructional practice. In survey responses and document reviews, evidence pointed to central office administrators guiding and supporting principals and other administrators to be effective leaders, collaborating with teachers and staff through professional development, setting and supporting the district mission and vision and in so doing, establishing core values for the school district. In all shared thus far, central office administrators evidenced their learning and influence within the school district by incorporating what is known and learned into daily practice and thus, answered question three of the study.

Through the evidenced gathered and presented, the ways in which central office administrators experience opportunities for continuous learning and professional development as well as the perceptions of how they use that knowledge in instructional leadership and practice have been determined for the district of study. Survey results, private and public document reviews, and the Strategic and Comprehensive Plan analysis revealed that collaborative and reflective practices were important to continuous learning and professional development and were ways in which administrators sought to enhance their knowledge of instructional leadership and practice. According to administrators, the district provided opportunities on a limited basis. Individual administrators further supported their learning and sought new learning via self-directed means.

Of further significance as shared through the survey data and confirmed by the document reviews and analysis were the perceptions of effectiveness and use that this enhanced knowledge had on instructional leadership and practice. Findings suggested that administrators incorporated this knowledge into daily practice in guiding and supporting principals to be effective leaders and teachers in effective instructional practices. Further identified was the effectiveness of this knowledge when shared through professional development and in setting and supporting the district mission and vision and establishing the goals to achieve them. Through all aspects of data collection, themes of collaboration and reflection, shared leadership and decision-making, sharing of knowledge and enhancing an understanding of practice, as well as providing job-embedded opportunities for continuous learning and professional development surfaced as common themes for the district and as illustrated in the literature.

Recommendations

Create an organizational culture where learning is valued and supported for central office administrators and all in the organization. The district should establish a mission and vision where the learning of all in the organization becomes the basis for and focus of improvement initiatives (Casey, 2013; Govaerts & Baert, 2011; Grossman, 2015; Weinstein, 2015). Learning for all should be identified as a key strategic goal (Shipton, Zhou, & Mooi, 2013) and embedded in the Comprehensive and Strategic Plan.

Identify a purpose, structure, and support for continuous learning and professional development opportunities for the district's central office administrative team. The district should provide increased time and opportunity to administrators in order to better their craft and enhance their knowledge regarding instructional practice and leadership. Of particular interest and need is the ability of administrators to understand and lead others through aspects of change. Professional learning communities developed for teachers provide the purpose, structure, and support for continuous learning and improvement (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008) and should be considered at an administrative level for central office administrators and those influencing the work of schools (David, 2009; Frick, Polizi, & Frick, 2009).

The district leadership team should limit the number of initiatives and competing demands expected in any given year. Central office administrators should adopt a collaborative philosophy with regard to district initiatives and the demands placed upon departments and schools within the district. Limiting initiatives and demanding the coordination of all central-office departments ensures better support with those services and resources (DuFour, 2003; Hilliard & Newsome, 2013).

The planning process model for professional development that follows provides guidance and a structure for districts seeking to provide a systemic culture of learning with ongoing opportunities for professional development for central office administrators. The professional development planning model

highlights goals and objectives for administrative learning as tied to leadership standards at the state and national levels. Through the creation of an administrative professional learning community, the model details methods of collaborative and reflective practice to enhance knowledge of instructional practice and leadership in the pursuit of increased student achievement.

Project
A Professional Development Planning Process Model for Central Office
Administrators

Introduction

Ensuring that all Southeastern School District students receive a high-quality education requires highly qualified and effective teachers in classrooms and leaders at the school and district level that are focused on raising the bar and increasing student achievement. As professionals in an ever-changing world, it becomes increasingly important to improve and enhance one's knowledge and skills. Improving and enhancing knowledge and skills occurs as a direct result of continuous learning and professional development opportunities.

Professional development is the process by which individuals experience opportunities to learn and as a result, enhance their understanding and application of best practice. Professional development is a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving the effectiveness of teachers and administrators for the goal of increasing student achievement (Wei, Darling-Hammond, & Adamson, 2010). Through a philosophy of continuous learning and by creating a culture of learning within the school district, employees are provided opportunities for continuous growth and improvement. In an environment where learning is the culture, value is placed on the contributions and growth of each individual. For these reasons and according to Wei et al (2010), adult learning must be embedded in the organizational structure of the school district and the

operational structure of central office and the individuals who support the professional development of the schools and district departments.

School Improvement Planning and Goal Development

Central office administrators participate in the school improvement planning process in order to support and influence instructional practice. The planning and monitoring process creates a forum for central office administrators to share instructional knowledge and practice with building leadership and assist in the identification of new strategies and practices, while also monitoring the progress and success of the plans. At the beginning of the school year, central office and building level administrators meet to review the work of the building leadership team and help establish the goals for student achievement and adult learning for the school year. Midyear meetings of the school teams with directors allow for formative review of the progress of the plans and provide support and direction as necessary. End of year meetings serve as summative review of the achievement attained and in celebration of effort. Reflection occurs at each meeting and serves to influence future practice. This improvement planning process evidences the influence that central office administrators have on the teaching and learning process and ultimately, the growth and achievement of students.

Model Components

The core mission of the school district is the achievement of its students. As a result, professional development activities should have content that will influence the instructional practices to increase student achievement. According to Larson (2013), professional development should consider administrative practices, align with the focus

and goals of the administrators' district and schools, reflect research and theory, and focus on practitioner-based learning. For district administrators serving in leadership roles and influencing the practices of principals, teachers, and the achievement of students, professional development should:

- Provide the knowledge and skills to think and plan strategically, ensuring that curriculum, instruction, assessment, staff development, teaching materials/resources and interventions for struggling students are aligned to each other as well as to the state academic standards and eligible content;
- Provide leaders with the ability to access and use appropriate data to inform decision-making;
- Empower leaders to create a culture of teaching and learning, with an emphasis on learning;
- Instruct the leader in managing resources for effective results. (PDE, 2007)

As a result, members of the Southeastern School District Cabinet will engage in professional development to support their learning as well as that of others in the school district. To this end, the establishment of an administrative professional learning community will provide a structure for continuous learning and job-embedded professional development opportunities. State standards for leadership practices evidenced in the domain framework and shared by the Department of Education set the expectations for leadership roles and responsibilities for all administrators in the state. The components and competencies of the leadership domains within the state and district provide content for a survey and self-assessment of knowledge. The domains of

leadership also serve as the basis for measuring professional development needs for central office administrators and will help to establish the content of structured meeting times and continuous learning opportunities. The leadership domains survey should be administered to central office leaders in advance of the summer cabinet retreat to provide information relevant to administrators' identified areas of need. The survey is meant to serve as a needs assessment of topics and content for the development of professional development throughout each school year.

Timeline and Structure

The annual cabinet retreat in June presents as the perfect time and opportunity to review the leadership domains survey, state and district initiatives, and goals of the district as well as those of individual leaders to determine the levels of professional development needed. The cabinet retreat provides a forum and framework for sharing information regarding the components and successful characteristics of professional learning communities. Establishing an understanding of the components of effective professional learning communities is essential to the successful implementation of an administrative professional learning community. In addition and throughout the year, one weekly cabinet meeting per month shall become the structure for the APLC. The monthly APLC meeting will provide opportunity for individual and collective learning to occur relevant to district initiatives and job responsibilities. Timeline is presented below in Table 1.

Table 1: Planning Model Timeline

Monthly Cabinet Meeting	Content	Activity
June	Understanding a culture of learning and the APLC Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set the vision for learning • Share components of successful professional learning communities
July	Create the APLC Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of norms for collaboration and group work
August	Identify professional development needs and methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze survey results for topic needs • Reference state and district initiatives • Determine methods of professional development and schedule opportunities
September – June and ongoing in future years	<p>Administrator survey of leadership needs, state and district initiatives, and supports for school goal plans assist in determining the topic and content for monthly meetings. Reference to the leadership domains and supervision/evaluation discussions is essential.</p> <p>Domain 1: Strategic/Cultural Leadership Domain 2: Systems Leadership Domain 3: Leadership for Learning Domain 4: Professional and Community Leadership</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional development activities determined by the topic and individuals involved • Discussion of learning and potential for influence on school and district practice

Content

Leaders are responsible for developing the communication capacities that are necessary for professional learning communities to function effectively. Time and space

for groups to meet and talk are essential. Leaders encourage talk about topics related to learning when building a culture of learning. They set the vision and introduce protocols for comfortable and safe discussions about difficult topics and challenging skills (Garmston, 2008).

Table 2: Content and Activities

Focus Area	Content/Activities
Setting the Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialogue and discuss the meaning regarding learning for all in the organization and establishing a culture that supports an interest in continuous learning and sharing of knowledge among all. • Share and discuss via participant jigsaw reading of the following articles: <u>A Culture of Learning</u> by Robert Grossman, 2015 and <u>Tracking Informal Learning</u> by Margery Weinstein, 2015. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identify key aspects from the articles regarding the definition of a learning culture, components of successful cultures, and tracking informal learning. • Engage participants in questions regarding the Mission, Vision, and Core Beliefs in creating a culture of learning.
Creating the Framework for an APLC <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing Group Norms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialogue and discuss the conceptual framework and themes of professional learning communities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Solid foundation of shared mission, vision, values, and goals; ○ Collaborative and interdependent work in a team to achieve common goals; and ○ Focus on results as evidenced by a commitment to continuous learning and improvement (Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour, 2002). • Share information from Chapter 1, What is a PLC? in the book, <u>Leading Professional Learning Communities</u> by Shirley Hord and William Sommers, 2008. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Particular actions/components to highlight include talking about practice, sharing knowledge of their craft, observing each other while in practice, and celebrating each other's successes. • Garner consensus on the merits of working in a PLC

	<p>environment as experienced at school levels with teachers and principals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage in conversation regarding working as a team and the benefits of establishing group norms for an administrative level PLC (APLC). • Consider the following areas when establishing group norms: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Time for meetings with agendas set and shared in advance ○ Active Listening of participants ○ Confidentiality of information shared ○ Trust within the group ○ Decision-making, Consensus, and Conflict ○ Participation by all ○ Expectations and Requirements (NSDC, 1994)
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Methods of Professional Development

Effective professional development occurs in many forms. In accordance with adult learning theory, it should be authentic and consider the knowledge and experiences of the learner. Summarized below are various methods used in providing continuous learning and professional development opportunities within an organization.

Action Research is a process of inquiry in which participants engage in collecting and analyzing data centered around a selected focus with the purpose of generating new knowledge and information on which to base decisions and take action (Lindstrom & Speck, 2004).

Coaching Collaboration is the process whereby individuals work in pairs or small teams of colleagues to observe each other and share feedback regarding best practice with one another (James-Ward, 2011; Grissom & Harrington, 2010; Frick et al., 2009; Hord & Sommers, 2008).

Collaborative Inquiry/Study Group with Colleagues references individuals meeting regularly to study a particular concern and develop appropriate response strategies based on the cyclical practices of action research (Allen et al., 2015; Winkelman, 2012).

Conference/Workshop Model refers to the concentrated study of specific content over a period of time that usually lasts a few days. Individuals attending content sessions, listening, and interacting with speakers and experts in the field evidence this type of learning (Lindstrom & Speck, 2004).

Demonstration and Application references an individual sharing expert knowledge or practice through a hands-on modeling and interactive display that affords participants the opportunity to become engaged in the practice (Honig, 2012).

Independent Reading and Reflective Practice is an aspect of self-growth and examination by an individual to enhance knowledge and create greater meaning (Mirci & Hensley, 2010).

Job-embedded/Joint Work Opportunities are those authentic work-based experiences that afford individuals the opportunity to build capacity and gain new knowledge regarding responsibilities of their positions. Such experiences often exist with through assistance relations and the use of on-site coaches, peers, and/or mentors (Silva, 2015; Honig, 2012).

Mentoring Opportunities are those situations in which an experienced individual works with a less experienced individual as a means to providing guidance, assistance, and support (Klinge, 2015; Grissom & Harrington, 2010).

Online PD/Webinar Opportunities reference knowledge dissemination via online connections to experts in the field. Interaction and opportunity to engage in collaborative dialogue with peers usually exists in this type of professional development.

Sharing via Social Media/Networking refers to resources and sharing opportunities that exist outside the district (Honig, 2012).

Site Visit and Reflection provides opportunities for individuals to visit districts in which investigating practices have been implemented. Reflection in and on practice with implications for change is the result (Lindstrom & Speck, 2004; Mirci & Hensley, 2010).

University Partnerships offer opportunities for sharing of knowledge and expertise through aspects of joint projects or research (Lindstrom & Speck, 2004).

Video-based Content and Discussion is professional learning delivered via video streaming with the purpose of providing content knowledge for discussion and application.

Planning Process Model Evaluation

The ultimate goal of providing continuous learning and professional development opportunities to central office administrators is their ability to influence the practices of others and thereby, increase the achievement of students. Outcome-based measures will assist in determining the success of the various methods of professional development and continuous learning opportunities as provided through the administrative professional learning community. Recognizing its importance, reflection in and on practice will serve as the vehicle for change among the central office administrators. In reflection and for

successful collaboration, cabinet members will use the norms of practice as a guide to the functioning of the team in the administrative professional learning community.

In order to determine the impact of professional development on individual leaders, participants will use self-report professional development evaluation forms following all continuous learning opportunities. Central office administrators will complete reflection logs at the midyear and end of year to report individual progress and summarize the ways in which they have used new learning to influence the practice of others for the ultimate goal of increasing student achievement. In addition, administrators and their supervisors will use the information from the evaluation forms and reflection logs in conjunction with the annual supervision and evaluation process. Building leaders and teachers will complete surveys annually to provide feedback regarding experiences as the building level to members of the central office team. Finally, state reported scores for student achievement would validate the actions of the central office administrators in influencing the teaching and learning process.

Suggested templates for the leadership domains and responsibilities survey, group norming activity, professional development evaluation forms, and reflection logs exist on the following pages.

Leadership Domains Survey for Professional Development Planning

Please read the component prompt for each domain area and indicate a rating that represents your level of knowledge and understanding.

Domain	Component	Rating Scale for Knowledge and Understanding of Components (1 being low through 5 being high)				
Domain 1: Strategic/Cultural Leadership	1a: Creates an Organizational Vision, Mission, and Strategic Goals	1	2	3	4	5
	1b: Uses Data for Informed Decision Making	1	2	3	4	5
	1c: Builds a Collaborative and Empowering Work Environment	1	2	3	4	5
	1d: Leads Change Efforts for Continuous Improvement	1	2	3	4	5
	1e: Celebrates Accomplishments and Acknowledges Failures	1	2	3	4	5
Domain 2: Systems Leadership	2a: Leverages Human and Financial Resources	1	2	3	4	5
	2b: Ensures a High Quality, High Performing Staff	1	2	3	4	5
	2c: Complies with Federal, State, and LEA Mandates	1	2	3	4	5
	2d: Establishes and Implements Expectations for Students and Staff	1	2	3	4	5
	2e: Communicates Effectively and Strategically	1	2	3	4	5
	2f: Manages Conflict Constructively	1	2	3	4	5
	2g: Ensures School Safety	1	2	3	4	5
Domain 3: Leadership for Learning	3a: Leads School Improvement Initiatives:	1	2	3	4	5
	3b: Aligns Curricula, Instruction, and Assessments	1	2	3	4	5
	3c: Implements High Quality Instruction	1	2	3	4	5
	3d: Sets High Expectations for All Students	1	2	3	4	5
	3e: Maximizes Instructional Time	1	2	3	4	5
Domain 4: Professional and Community Leadership	4a: Maximizes Professional Responsibilities Through Parent Involvement and Community Engagement	1	2	3	4	5
	4b: Shows professionalism	1	2	3	4	5
	4c: Supports Professional Growth	1	2	3	4	5

Leadership Responsibilities Survey for Professional Development Planning

Please read the leadership actions and skills below and indicate a rating that represents your interest in participating in professional development opportunities.

Leadership Actions and Skills	Rating Scale to indicate need/desire for Professional Development (1 being low through 5 being high)				
Establishing Vision & Values	1	2	3	4	5
Emphasizing Accountability and Celebration	1	2	3	4	5
Creating a Sense of Service and Shared Responsibility	1	2	3	4	5
Demonstrating Reflection and Balance	1	2	3	4	5
Providing Inspiration & Influence	1	2	3	4	5
Evidencing Listening & Communication Skills	1	2	3	4	5
Challenging the Status Quo: Facilitating, Leading, and Managing Change	1	2	3	4	5
Identifying Needs and Providing for the Professional Development of Staff	1	2	3	4	5
Fostering a Culture of Data-driven Decision Making <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using data to solve problems • Using data to identify concerns and implement change 	1	2	3	4	5
Promoting Action-Oriented Results Strategies	1	2	3	4	5
Supporting Technology Integration	1	2	3	4	5
Conducting Effective Meetings and Encouraging Collaborative Discourse	1	2	3	4	5
Monitoring Staff Workloads and Productivity	1	2	3	4	5
Other:					

As an adult learner, please identify the form(s) or method(s) of professional development that work best for you.

Forms/Methods of Professional Development	Please place a check in the boxes below for all that apply
Action Research	
Coaching Collaboration	
Conference/Workshop Model	
Demonstration and Application	
Independent Reading and Practice	
Inquiry/Study Group with Colleagues	
Job-embedded Opportunities	
Mentoring Opportunities	
Sharing via Social Media/Networking	
Site Visit and Reflection	
University Partnerships	
Video-based Content and Discussion	
Other:	

Group Norm Activity

1. Prepare large posters with the attribute names indicated at the top.
2. Provide all team members with the same color sticky notes and writing utensils.
3. Ask each person to reflect on the components and record actions/behaviors that will contribute to effective group interactions.
4. When finished, direct each person to post his/her reflections on the appropriately identified poster.
5. Read and process through the norms on each sticky note and allow time for group reaction and discussion. Group like thoughts and ideas together.
6. As a final step, have pairs of team members select one attribute poster and summarize all ideas represented into beliefs/norms under which the group will work. Record the norms on a grid similar to the sample below and share with all members of the learning community for reference in future meetings.

Attribute	Beliefs/Norms
Time & Agendas	
Active Listening of Participants	
Confidentiality of Information	
Trust within Group	
Decision-making, Consensus, and Conflict	
Participation	
Expectations and Requirements	

Professional Development Evaluation Form

Type and/or Title of Activity: _____

Dates/Time Period: _____

Facilitator (if appropriate): _____

Part I ~ Content and Understanding

Participant Satisfaction	Please use the rating scale to indicate level of success for learning activity (1 being poor through 5 being excellent)				
1. The activity was well organized and meaningful to the participant.	1	2	3	4	5
2. The activity enhanced the leader's content knowledge in the specified area.	1	2	3	4	5
3. The activity increased the leader's skill set regarding research of best practice.	1	2	3	4	5
4. The activity provided skills relevant to the leader's roles and responsibilities.	1	2	3	4	5
5. The activity provided the leader with knowledge and skills to think strategically.	1	2	3	4	5
6. The activity enhanced the leader's professional growth.	1	2	3	4	5

Part II ~ Impact on Professional Practice

1. In what ways did the activity influence your knowledge of instructional leadership and practice with regard to Domain 1: Strategic/Cultural Leadership?

2. In what ways did the activity influence your knowledge of instructional leadership and practice with regard to Domain 2: Systems Leadership?

3. In what ways did the activity influence your knowledge of instructional leadership and practice with regard to Domain 3: Leadership for Learning?

4. In what ways did the activity influence your knowledge of instructional leadership and practice with regard to Domain 4: Professional and Community Leadership?

Reflection Log**Administrator's Name & Position:** _____**Date:** _____

Please indicate the period for reporting in the appropriate area below.

Mid-Year Report _____**End of Year Report** _____

-
1. In what methods of continuous learning and professional development have you been engaged?
-

2. How have the knowledge and skills you acquired influenced your leadership practice?
-

3. How have you worked collaboratively with others to support the mission, vision, and goals of the school district?
-

4. In what ways have you influenced others in the school district?
-

5. Please share any other reflections that are pertinent to your knowledge of instructional leadership and practice.
-

Appendix B: Letter of Cooperation

September 4, 2014

Dr. Elizabeth Warren
Walden University
100 Washington Avenue S #900
Minneapolis, MN 55401

Dear Dr. Warren,

The [REDACTED] has conditionally approved Ms. Cheryl McCue's request to conduct research in a large suburban school district to examine the presence and use of collaborative and reflective practices among central office administrators and the perceived ways in which those practices promote collegial relationships and enhance knowledge of effective instructional practice as well as professional learning and development among district administrators. It is understood that this research is being conducted for her doctoral study at Walden University.

This approval is contingent upon the IRB Committee's approval of Ms. McCue's proposed research project. Please send the IRB Committee's written approval to the Assistant Superintendent's Office.

Should you have any questions or concerns regarding this, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Dr. Diane Holben
Assistant Superintendent

cc: Ms. Cheryl McCue

Appendix C: Participation Letter

January 24, 2015

Dear Administrator,

As part of the requirements of my doctoral program at Walden University and with the approval of your Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent, I am conducting a research study and would greatly appreciate your support. The topic of my dissertation and project study is continuous learning and professional development at the central office level in order to enhance knowledge of effective instructional leadership and practice.

The major components of data collection within the project include a survey with open-ended responses and review of school district documents that provide insight into work product and job-embedded practices. Members of the central office instructional administration will be asked to participate in the completion of the survey as a result of their responsibility for instructional leadership and practice within the District.

Please note that participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose to refuse to participate at any time without consequence or prejudice. The data that you will provide via the survey completion is being collected anonymously through Survey Monkey. A link to the survey is included at the end of the detailed consent information which is also attached to the email sent with this participation letter. The link will also be included in a follow-up reminder email to be sent next week.

Should you have any questions regarding this study, please feel free to contact me on my cell phone at [REDACTED]. Thank you in advance for any consideration given to my request and know that your time in participation is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Cheryl A. R. McCue, Doctoral Candidate
Walden University

Appendix D: Detailed Consent Form/Protocols

You are invited to participate in an open-ended response survey that has been designed to gather information regarding your experiences and perceptions related to administrative learning practices. You were invited to participate because of your knowledge and experience as a central office administrator. The selection criteria for inclusion in the study included central office experience with responsibilities for instructional leadership and practice within the school district. Please read this form and ask any questions you have before completing the open-ended survey.

The survey is being conducted by a researcher named Cheryl McCue, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. Cheryl McCue also serves as the Director of Human Resources in the North Penn School District.

Background Information:

The purpose of this qualitative survey is to explore the ways in which central office administrators experience opportunities for continuous learning and professional development in order to enhance their knowledge of effective instructional leadership and practice.

Procedures:

If you agree, you will be asked to respond to an open-ended survey, which should take approximately 20 – 30 minutes to complete.

Voluntary Nature of the Survey:

Your participation in this study is voluntary. This means that everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you want to complete the survey. If you decide at any time, you do not want to participate, then simply discontinue the survey without submitting your responses. You may skip any questions that you feel are too personal.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Survey:

There is the minimal risk of psychological stress during the completion of the survey. If you feel stressed during the completion of the survey, you may stop at any time. The information you share regarding practices you employ in enhancing your instructional knowledge as a central office administrator may serve as a guiding force for future professional development opportunities as reflected in this project study and to that end, may serve as a benefit to you and the administrative team in the District.

Compensation:

There is no compensation for participating in this survey.

Confidentiality:

Any information you provide is being collected anonymously via the survey. The researcher will not use your information for any purposes outside of this doctoral project study. Also, as information is being collected anonymously, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in any reports of the data.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher's name is Cheryl McCue. The researcher's dissertation chairperson is Dr. Elizabeth Warren. If you have questions prior to or during your completion of the survey, you may contact the researcher via phone at [REDACTED].

Statement of Consent:

In order to protect your privacy, no signatures are being collected on the consent form. Your completion of the survey electronically in Survey Monkey will indicate your consent.

The link to the survey location is: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/97RMB35>

Please save or print a copy of this consent form for your future reference.

Appendix E: Survey Protocols & Questions

Introductory statement: (for inclusion at the beginning of the survey instructions)

Thank you for participating in this project study. Please remember that this survey is completely voluntary and you may discontinue your participation at any time in the study. The questions posed today will focus on your perceptions as to the ways in which professional development and continuous learning opportunities are experienced and may lead to enhanced knowledge of effective instructional practice. The survey should take approximately 20 - 30 minutes to complete.

Following are definitions that may be helpful to consider when answering the questions presented in the survey.

Professional learning and development. Professional learning and development refers to the process of acquiring new knowledge and skills in order to improve the teaching and learning process in classrooms for teachers and students (Spillane, Healey, & Parise, 2009).

Reflective practice. Reflective practice refers to the act of thinking about one's own work, the work of colleagues, and/or the school and its context in regards to a primary task (James, Dunning, Connolly, & Elliot, 2007). Reflective practice has also been referred to as the "ability to frame and reframe the practice setting, to develop and respond to this framing through action so that the practitioner's wisdom-in-action is enhanced and ...articulation or professional knowledge is encouraged" (Loughran, 2002, p. 42).

Reflective thinking. Reflective thinking or meta-cognition is an active process of thinking and monitoring one's own learning process that results in a change in conceptual understanding (Singh, Hawkins, & Whymark, 2007).

Collaborative practices. Collaborative practices in this study are defined as "shared school governance, which encourages shared vision, broad participation, and shared accountability for learning; collaborative decisions focusing on academic improvement; and broad participation in efforts to evaluate the school's academic development" (Heck & Hallinger, 2010, p. 237-238).

Research Question

In what ways do central office administrators experience professional development and continuous learning opportunities to enhance their knowledge of effective instructional leadership and practice and what are their perceptions regarding the effectiveness of these practices?

Q1. In what ways do you feel you learn best?

- a. What is your knowledge of collaborative and reflective practices for learning?
- b. Have you ever participated in collaborative or reflective practices?
- c. What are some examples of practices that you consider to be collaborative or reflective in nature?
- d. How do these practices affect your instructional knowledge and skills?

Q2. How does the District provide central office administrators with opportunities for continuous learning in order to increase their knowledge of instructional leadership and practice?

- a. In what ways do central office administrators use what they have learned in support of instructional practice in the district?
- b. Do you know of other ways for central office administrators to experience continuous learning opportunities?
- c. If you answered yes, above, what are other ways exist for central office administrators to experience continuous learning opportunities?
- d. How effective do you think these methods are in terms of your learning?

Q3. In what ways do central office administrators participate in professional development?

- a. District provided?
- b. Self-directed?
- c. How do these practices affect your instructional knowledge and skills?
- d. Do these practices impact your learning and leadership of instructional practice? If so, in what ways?

Q4. Do you believe these practices prepare you to influence the instructional practice of others in the organization? If so, how?

Q5. What might help to enhance your ability to be an instructional leader?

- a. How might school districts use collaborative and reflective practices as a form of continuous learning and professional development for their central office administrators?

Appendix F: Sample Question Summary

Question 14: What might help to enhance your ability to be an instructional leader?

Respondent Number	Comment	Date/Time
1	Professional development needs to be differentiated based on the leaders' learning style and need for learning. We need to stop using our internal folks for all of our pd and bring in folks that have an expert lens on instructional leadership and practice.	2/26/2015 8:30 AM
2	More time for collaboration with colleagues	2/25/2015 1:30 PM
3	Time set aside to collaborate at meetings and create a vision and PD plans together from book studies we complete together. Too much time is spent in meetings talking about what we are doing rather than planning out what we can be doing as a team to improve PD district-wide.	2/24/2015 1:02 PM
4	Actually seeing the curricula in practice in the classroom	2/24/2015 9:38 AM
5	More time to collaborate and reflect - I don't like just racing from one task to the next without sufficient consideration of the consequences. More opportunities to learn from colleagues in the county - I find that I frequently cannot attend countywide meetings because district commitments take precedence. I think that a fundamental rethinking of meeting structures in the district is also key - they are designed to deliver information, not to collaborate or reflect on topics. The district norms are skewed toward positional authority, so there is sometimes a reluctance to fully participate as equals in collaboration.	2/23/2015 11:22 AM
6	Purposeful, well-thought out areas of professional development provided by the District. If the district's focus was the PA Core shifts and it's impact on instruction, then we should be hammered with PD in this area. All admin should be experts in that area if that is the district's goal. If the district had a firm vision and a solid PD plan for teachers, then the admin PD would mirror that plan. It does not exist	2/17/2015 2:10 PM

here. It would greatly impact my ability to work with colleagues, make instructional decisions, work with teachers and in the end impact student achievement.

- | | | |
|----|--|--------------------|
| 7 | I would like administrator meetings to focus more on collaborative practice and professional development rather than being the recipient of information. There are many talented, smart individuals in the organization and I don't believe we harness the collective power enough. | 2/17/2015 10:47 AM |
| 8 | Regular conversations during a dedicated time Dedicated support and time for management, so that additional time can be given over to learning and leading Empowering teacher leaders | 1/31/2015 9:39 AM |
| 9 | More time to focus on instruction rather than other matters which take away from this. | 1/30/2015 10:08 AM |
| 10 | Sometimes, you don't know what you don't know. I would love to be exposed to and to learn about things I might not be aware of such as current research. | 1/26/2015 3:17 PM |
| 11 | For many years our superintendent has said he will develop a professional learning program for central administrators. This still has not happened although he has talked about it for 4 years now. A defined program in and of itself would benefit all of the central administrators, however his attention to developing a program would indicate that he values his central staff. | 1/24/2015 6:54 PM |
| 12 | Inherent in the process of collaborative and reflective practices as a form of continuous learning is the issue of trust. I think that central office administrators in an organization need to be able to trust one another and need to presume positive interactions about one another for collaboration and reflective practices to become a critical part of the culture of an organization. | 1/24/2015 4:30 PM |

Appendix G: Survey Coding Form

Research Question		
In what ways do central office administrators experience professional development and continuous learning opportunities to enhance their knowledge of effective instructional leadership and practice and what are their perceptions regarding the effectiveness of these practices?		
Codes	Notes	Themes
<p>Collaborative and Reflective discussions with colleagues</p> <p>Hands-on/Observation and Application</p> <p>Project-based and job-embedded</p> <p>Collaborating with others, guiding and supporting other administrators and teachers</p> <p>District mission and vision/goals</p> <p>Observation, Job-embedded Learning, Webinars and Trainings, PD</p>	<p>Q1. In what ways do you feel you learn best?</p> <p>a. What is your knowledge of collaborative and reflective practices for learning?</p> <p>b. Have you ever participated in collaborative or reflective practices?</p> <p>c. What are some examples of practices that you consider to be collaborative or reflective in nature?</p> <p>d. How do these practices affect your instructional knowledge and skills?</p> <p>Q2. How does the District provide central office administrators with opportunities for continuous learning in order to increase their knowledge of instructional leadership and practice?</p> <p>a. In what ways do central office administrators use what they have learned in support of instructional practice in the district?</p> <p>b. Do you know of other ways for central office administrators to experience continuous learning opportunities?</p> <p>c. If you answered yes, above, what are other ways exist for central office administrators to experience continuous learning opportunities?</p> <p>d. How effective do you think these methods are in terms of your learning?</p>	<p><i>Sharing of knowledge</i></p> <p><i>Enhancing instructional knowledge and practice for self and others</i></p> <p><i>Job-embedded opportunities ~ realistic and meaningful</i></p> <p><i>Differentiated PD</i></p> <p><i>District Goals/Vision</i></p> <p><i>Shared Leadership</i></p> <p><i>Collaboration and Reflection with others</i></p> <p><i>Influence for others</i></p>

<p>District provided and Self-directed ~ Differentiated</p> <p>Collaborative and Reflective</p> <p>Sharing of work</p> <p>Decision Making</p> <p>Visioning and Leadership</p> <p>Guide and support principals and teachers, other administrators</p> <p>Setting and supporting the District Mission</p> <p>Establishing Goals and Objectives for Practice</p> <p>Incorporate into daily practice</p> <p>PLCs</p>	<p>Q3. In what ways do central office administrators participate in professional development?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. District provided? b. Self-directed? c. How do these practices affect your instructional knowledge and skills? d. Do these practices impact your learning and leadership of instructional practice? If so, in what ways? <p>Q4. Do you believe these practices prepare you to influence the instructional practice of others in the organization? If so, how?</p> <p>Q5. What might help to enhance your ability to be an instructional leader?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. How might school districts use collaborative and reflective practices as a form of continuous learning and professional development for their central office administrators? 	
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Appendix H: Administrative Sharepoint Review

Sharepoint Document Review Sample

Activity Reference: Cabinet/K-12 Meeting Agendas and Notes

Reviewer: Cheryl A. R. McCue

Date(s): March 5 and 6, 2015

Codes	Document Review Notes	Reflective Notes	Themes
Leadership and Management Collaborative Visioning Decision Making/Planning Influencing Others	State Initiatives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educator Effectiveness Plan • Administrator Effectiveness Plan 	Notes indicated discussion regarding the collaborative planning process and decision making with regard to implementation plan. Timeline and action steps included with responsibilities identified.	<i>Shared Leadership and Management</i> <i>Collaborative and Reflective Planning</i> <i>Decision Making</i> <i>Instructional Knowledge and Focus</i>
Decision Making/Planning Instructional Knowledge and Sharing Collaborative Discussion Influence for Others	PD Planning and Calendar for Staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timeline mapping • Topics Identified 	Mapping of timeline and topics indicated collaboration for responsibilities for each content area/topic identified to a supervisor. Discussion of in-service days captured in minutes.	<i>Influence for Others</i> <i>Visioning</i> <i>Reflection on Practice</i>
Collaborative Discussion Decision Making Influence for Others Collaborative Discussion	Policy and Procedure Review <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer Clearances and Employment Checks • Independent Contractor Agreement 	Policy and procedure review for Volunteer Clearances and compliance with the new law were summarized in the documents.	

<p>Information Sharing and Visioning</p> <p>Directive</p> <p>Collaborative Discussion and Planning</p> <p>Shared Leadership and Management</p> <p>Visioning</p> <p>Continuous Learning and Professional Development</p> <p>Collaborative Sharing of Information</p> <p>Instructional Knowledge and Focus</p> <p>Reflection</p>	<p>Technology Integration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposal regarding 1:1 devices for students <p>Cabinet Retreat</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dates identified in June. <p>Administrative Leadership Academy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dates and topics identified in the notes <p>Goal Achievement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of goals and the action steps attained to date • Progress measures for implementation and effectiveness were indicated by each responsible administrator 	<p>Notes indicated discussion regarding implementation of the 1:1 device proposal and consideration for policy/regulation and development.</p> <p>Appears to be an item managed by the Superintendent for date identification.</p> <p>Dates and topics for Leadership Academy were identified and captured in the minutes. Collaborative responsibility was referenced for Cabinet members and topics. Reference made to common and shared planning time.</p> <p>Updates regarding goal attainment were captured in the minutes. Expectations for those meeting with success and those falling short were referenced. Seems to be a reflective process and one that allows for collaborative dialogue and trouble shooting.</p>	
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Appendix I: Coding Summary

Categories and Subcategories: Themes

Category/Code	Subcategory	Theme
1. Collaborative and Reflective Practices	Knowledge Experience Sharing Information	<i>Shared Leadership and Management</i>
2. Continuous Learning	Job-embedded Observation and Application Self-directed Differentiated	<i>Collaborative and Reflective Planning</i> <i>Decision Making</i>
3. Professional Development	Self-directed District provided Differentiated Technology Social Media	<i>Influence for Others</i> <i>Visioning</i>
4. Instructional Knowledge	Broaden Understanding Continuous Growth Theory and Application Improve Knowledge and Skills	<i>Instructional Knowledge and Focus</i>
5. Instructional Leadership	Coaching Strategies/Tools Gain/Vary Perspective Collaborative and Reflective Vision Professional Development	<i>Reflection on Practice</i>
6. Organizational Influence	Greater Collaboration Inform Conversations Transfer Knowledge and Skills	

Appendix J: Confidentiality Agreement

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT**Name of Signer: Michael Gurdineer**

During the course of my activity in reviewing data for this research, I, Michael Gurdineer have had access to information that was collected and presented to me in an anonymous fashion for my review. I acknowledge that the information must remain confidential, and that improper disclosure of confidential information can be damaging to the participants and study.

By signing this Confidentiality Agreement I acknowledge and agree that:

1. I will not disclose or discuss any confidential information with others, including friends or family.
2. I will not in any way divulge, copy, release, sell, loan, alter or destroy any confidential information except as properly authorized.
3. I will not discuss confidential information where others can overhear the conversation. I understand that it is not acceptable to discuss confidential information even if the participant's name is not used.
4. I will not make any unauthorized transmissions, inquiries, modification or purging of confidential information.
5. I agree that my obligations under this agreement will continue after termination of the job that I will perform.
6. I understand that violation of this agreement will have legal implications.
7. I will only access or use systems or devices I'm officially authorized to access and I will not demonstrate the operation or function of systems or devices to unauthorized individuals.

Signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the agreement and I agree to comply with all the terms and conditions stated above.

Signature:



Date:

4/11/2016