2016

District-Funded Common Core Collaboration Grants Used for Teacher Professional Development

Stephanie Pratt Gregson
Walden University

Walden University

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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Stephanie Gregson

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Walden University
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Abstract

With the adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English language arts and mathematics by the State of California in 2010, a shift in instructional practices along with the level of rigor and expectations for students began. As a result of these changes, a local school district sought a way through district-funded Common Core Collaboration Grants (CCCG) to provide professional development that supported 4th–6th grade teachers in their implementation of the CCSS. The purpose of this qualitative program evaluation case study was to examine teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of professional development funded by CCCG in supporting 4th–6th grade teachers in understanding and application of instructional strategies aligned with the CCSS. Weiss's theory of change and Roy and Killion's program evaluation framework guided the study. Data were collected from individual interviews of 7 teachers of 4th–6th grade who participated in the district CCCG professional development sessions. Interview data were coded and themes of choice, time, collaboration, and integration of the CCSS emerged. The results indicated that the use of CCCG for professional development is assisting teachers in successfully implementing the CCSS through increased collaboration and more opportunities to engage in learning within their own contexts. A program evaluation report and presentation to the district school board were developed. The results of this study may affect positive social change through suggestions of an alternative in the form of grants to schools and districts looking for innovative ways to support teachers and enhance student learning through professional development on the CCSS.

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Dedication

For my children, Niccolas and Maddis. Remember to be true to yourselves, have courage, be kind, and always follow the path of being a life-long learner. You are and always will be my greatest accomplishments.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank and acknowledge Dr. Heather Caldwell for the countless readings and re-readings of this study, for your feedback, guidance, and encouragement. Also, thank you, Dr. Brenda Kennedy, for your guidance and support throughout this journey.

There are a few special people that I would acknowledge, as they provided multiple levels of support throughout this endeavor. My parents deserve special acknowledgement, as without their unconditional love, encouragement, and ongoing support, I would not have been able to begin or complete this journey. To my tribe; thank you, Chris, Laura, and Michelle, for the early morning workouts that are always therapy sessions and for the ongoing encouragement and belief that you have always shared with me. For my strong, Lisa, there are not enough words to express my gratitude and appreciation for the many adventures we have shared over the years during our growth journey. Your support and never ending faith in me helped me become the person I am today. I can't be me without you.

Finally, the most important acknowledgement, my husband, Jeff. Without your constant love, support, belief, and encouragement, this endeavor I embarked on would never have been accomplished. Thank you for the reassurance that our family would keep on going even with me working for hours and days while you kept everything afloat. You are my everything.

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

In 2010, the State of California, along with 42 other states, adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English Language Arts and Mathematics (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2014). The CCSS reflect knowledge and skills that students will need to be successful in college and careers, such as critical thinking, problem solving, collaborative discussion, and perseverance (Marrongelle, Sztajn, & Smith, 2013; Wallender, 2014). Wallender (2014) stated, "The Common Core will bring philosophical, curricular, instructional and assessment changes to public education" (p. 11). This educational change challenges school districts to offer quality professional development that will support teachers in implementing the instructional shifts required by the CCSS (Marrongelle et al., 2013). This doctoral study provides an answer to the question of how a local school district can support teachers in implementing the CCSS. Specifically, this research focused on district-funded Common Core Collaboration Grants (CCCG) for teachers teaching Grades 4 through 6 in multiple subject areas within the study district.

Definition of the Problem

For the purposes of this study, a pseudonym has been used for the local school district. Mattos Unified School District (MUSD) is located in a growing suburban city in Northern California that originated as a farming community. MUSD is one of many school districts across the nation that is implementing district-coordinated professional development programs as a result of CCSS-related instructional shifts and expectations in education. In 2013, MUSD received one-time funds from the California Department of

Education to provide professional development for the implementation of the CCSS (California Education Code, 2013). Using one-time funds for professional development based on a school district's average daily attendance (ADA), many school districts have chosen various ways to provide professional development to their instructional staff. MUSD chose to allocate the state-provided funds to develop a district-coordinated professional development system that included three layers. The first layer of the district-coordinated professional development system consists of teacher collaboration time focused on unit building for targeted CCSS called Common Core Collaboration Grants (CCCG). The other layers consist of district-wide professional development offerings focused on learning strategies aligned with the CCSS and professional development sessions provided by outside educational partners that are one size fits all. MUSD leaders want to determine the effectiveness of the first layer, the CCCG, to best allocate future professional development resources and budget. This study provides research and information that MUSD personnel will need to make future decisions on budget, personnel resources, and teacher professional development.

Rationale

As the United States moves further into a global economy, it will be imperative that students have the skills necessary to compete and thrive in the 21st century. Twenty-five years ago, over 90% of jobs were considered low skilled and only required a high school diploma. That number has changed to only 10% of all jobs in the U.S. economy requiring low-skilled labor (Calkins, Ehrenworth, & Lehman, 2012). This huge shift in the economy requires students to have higher level skills, including strong literacy skills

as well as the ability to think critically and solve problems (Calkins et al., 2012). The CCSS provides "an absolutely critical wake-up call" because students of today need to have strong literacy skills and an education that provides them with a curriculum focused on critical thinking, debate, and research projects and that allows them to be problem solvers (Calkins et al., 2012, p. 9). The adoption of the CCSS challenges school districts to provide effective professional development to support teachers in increasing their understanding of the CCSS and being able to integrate the standards into their daily instruction (Marrongelle, Sztajn, & Smith, 2013). Calkins et al. (2012) noted that it will be "important for teachers across your school to work together to ratchet up the level of instruction and, in so doing, to develop stances and systems for engaging in continuous improvement" (p. 15). This doctoral study provides an evaluation of the MUSD CCCG to determine whether the local school district was effective in supporting teachers to work together in applying the CCSS to their classroom instruction. Specifically, this research focused on district-funded CCCG for teachers teaching multiple subjects in Grades 4 through 6 within the MUSD. The purpose of the CCCG was to provide collaboration time for teachers to deepen their knowledge of the CCSS and to learn how to integrate the CCSS into daily lesson plans and units of study.

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

School districts have struggled with the challenges of a new set of standards and an aligned accountability system since the adoption of the CCSS in 2010. Kober and Rentner (2012) found that 37 states have faced challenges in the administration of the CCSS in the areas of adequate funding, time to provide the necessary professional

development, technology challenges in carrying out online assessments, and finding aligned instructional materials and curriculum. Kober and Rentner stated,

> All of the CCSS-adopting states that we surveyed have developed or are developing comprehensive state implementation plans, and most are requiring their districts to implement the standards. All of the CCSS-adopting states in the survey are conducting statewide professional development and designing professional development materials to help teachers master the standards, and most are changing their teacher preparation programs and evaluation systems. (p. 2)

To measure each student's progress towards meeting the CCSS, the State of California, along with 22 other states, has implemented the computer-adaptive Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) summative assessment. The SBAC summative assessment measures students' ability to critically think and problem solve through performance tasks and constructed-response-type questions in both English language arts and mathematics (Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, n.d.). In the spring of 2014, schools across the nation administered the field test of the SBAC summative assessment. No student results were provided to states or school districts because this was strictly a field test to determine the validity of the questions within the SBAC summative assessment. Spring 2015 brought the first administration of the SBAC summative assessment, which yielded student results for states, school districts, students, and parents. The results of the SBAC summative assessment for the 2015-2016 and 2016-

2017 school years will serve as baseline data to measure student progress toward meeting the CCSS requirements.

In California, the SBAC summative assessment is a part of the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP). The CAASPP system is the school accountability system for each school district and will determine if a school district is making sufficient progress in the implementation of the CCSS. However, the State of California froze the accountability system during the transition time of implementing the CCSS (California Department of Education, 2014). This was done in part to provide school districts in California the opportunity and time to develop and institute an effective professional development system that supports teachers with implementing the CCSS.

Prior to the 2014–2015 school year, MUSD was only implementing limited professional development, which included workshops from external content experts and site-based professional development sessions that were determined by the school site administrator, such as sessions on depth of knowledge, restorative practices, and positive behavior in schools (PBIS). In the 2014-2015 school year, MUSD developed and offered the CCCG to allow teachers in Grades 4through 6 to have the opportunity to collaborate on how to best incorporate the CCSS through lesson designs on targeted CCSS. The MUSD decided to begin the CCCG based on teacher surveys asking for more collaboration time. These grants would allow teachers to collaborate outside of their contract hours at the district professional development rate of $41.00 per hour. This allowed teachers to be compensated for their work and to schedule their collaboration

time at their convenience after school and on weekends. During the 2014–2015 school year, over 200 teachers participated in a CCCG, and more than 100 applied for the 2015-2016 school year. The CCCG was used for the 2015–2016 school year, but it is unknown at this time whether it will continue into the 2017–2018 school year.

In a search for other districts or states providing a type of teacher collaboration grant, I found none matching the description or intent of the MUSD CCCG; therefore, this study is specific to MUSD. There were a few examples of statewide organizations and local education agencies providing grants focused on collaborating in varying content areas. For instance, the Oregon State Department of Education, beginning in 2011, provided the opportunity for districts to apply for the District Collaboration Grants established by Oregon State Senate Bill 252

> to provide funding for school districts to improve student achievement through the voluntary collaboration of teachers and administrators to implement new approaches to career pathways for teachers and administrators; evaluation processes for teachers and administrators; compensation models for teachers and administrators; and enhanced professional development opportunities for teachers and administrators. (Oregon State Department of Education, 2011, "Overview," para. 1)

Examples of other types of collaboration grants come from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, which offered Collaborative Work Grants to help improve learning for all students and improve teaching by "establishing effective and efficient collaborative data teams" (Missouri Department of Education,

2015, “Collaborative Work,” para. 1). The Center for Transformative Teaching and Learning offered five $1,000 grants for public or private teachers to “work together to incubate, grow, and share an idea that benefits their students, schools, or professional community” (The Center for Transformative Teaching & Learning, 2015, “Ideas in Education Festival,” para. 1).

Evidence of the Problem From the Professional Literature

As many states across the nation are starting to implement the CCSS, research on this topic varies and has only just begun for many school districts; however, it is possible to apply research that focuses on effective professional development and implementation of new curriculum and standards (Liebtag, 2013). Although research regarding effective professional development is usually focused at the site-based level, districts are the entities charged with designing, implementing, funding and supporting professional development (Firestone, Mangin, Martinez, & Polovsky, 2005). Effective professional development coordinated at the district level can be an impetus for true change in teaching and learning practices. This change can happen if district programs are coherent and focused while also addressing the needs of teachers and differences in teachers’ experiences (Gibson & Brooks, 2012; Marrongelle et al., 2013).

Many studies over the last decade or more have identified the essential elements of effective professional development. These essential elements include a focus on curriculum, content, and standards; collaborative opportunities for all teachers; connections to practice; delivery in ways that are relevant and meaningful to teachers; follow-up support, such as modeling and coaching; development opportunities embedded

in the teachers' workday; a basis in adult learning theory; and support from all levels of administration (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009; Desimone, 2011; Firestone et al., 2005; Gibson & Brooks, 2012; Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Marrongelle et al., 2013). When focusing specifically on implementing the CCSS, district-coordinated professional development needs to emphasize the collaboration element and include a systematic approach for teachers on the instructional shifts of the CCSS (Liebtag, 2013; Saavedra & Steele, 2012). In this study, the collaboration element is looked at further, and recommendations are provided.

Before this study, there had not been a formal evaluation conducted on the MUSD's CCCG. This particular problem was chosen for study because MUSD personnel and I recognized this as an opportunity to evaluate the CCCG and its effectiveness in order to determine whether funding should be continued. In order to assess the effectiveness of the MUSD CCCG, a qualitative program evaluation was necessary because "in general, program evaluation examines programs to determine their worth and to make recommendations for programmatic refinement and success" (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010, p. 317).

Definitions

The following definitions are provided to further explain terms used throughout this study.

District coordinated professional development system: A professional development system for teachers designed, funded, and provided by the local school district versus the school site (Firestone et al., 2005).

Effective professional development: Professional development that has a positive impact on student learning and leads to an increase in student achievement. Effective professional development can be defined as having these characteristics: intensive, connected to practice, ongoing, focused on teaching and learning within content areas, connected to school initiatives, and including a strong collaboration component (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Desimone, 2011; Francis & Jacobsen, 2013; Guskey &Yoon, 2009).

Common Core State Standards (CCSS): The set of standards for English language arts and mathematics adopted by the State of California in 2010 and developed by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. The CCSS have the aim of developing students' ability to problem solve, think critically, and be college and career ready when they graduate from high school (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2014).

Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC): A state-led consortium funded by the U.S. Department of Education that works to provide assessments aligned with the CCSS. The SBAC is one of two consortiums within the United States that worked to implement an assessment system aligned to the CCSS by the 2014–2015 school year. The SBAC has provided the State of California with interim assessments, a summative assessment, and a digital library for teacher resource and professional development (Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, n.d.).

Instructional shifts: This term refers to the instructional shift students and teachers will be engaged in with the implementation of the CCSS. The instructional

shifts in mathematics involve a focus on going in depth with the CCSS, coherence across grade levels and topics, and rigor in theoretical understanding and procedural skill, in addition to fluency and application of those skills. In the area of language arts, the shifts involve practice with complex text and academic language, providing evidence from text, and building knowledge through nonfiction texts (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012; Phillips & Wong, 2010; Porter, McMaken, Hwang & Yang, 2011).

Significance

Beginning in the 2014–2015 school year, schools in California assessed their students' progress toward meeting the requirements of the CCSS through administering the SBAC summative assessment. School districts will be using the SBAC for many years to come, as the SBAC summative assessment is part of the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP), which is the accountability system for all school districts within California. For a successful implementation of the CCSS, it is imperative that school districts use a district-coordinated professional development program that encompasses all of the effective elements of professional development along with an emphasis on teacher collaboration (Liebtag, 2013; Saavedra & Steele, 2012). These professional learning programs should include multiple opportunities for collaboration on meaningful and relevant content that is connected to teachers' contexts (Liebtag, 2013).

Studying the CCCG within MUSD will be helpful for the district administration, school board, teachers, and other local school districts because the study will provide the information necessary to understand the effectiveness of the CCCG in supporting fourth-

through sixth-grade teachers with the integration of the CCSS into daily practices. Furthermore, the school board of education and district administration will have additional information to be able to make decisions on future funding for the CCCG.

Guiding/Research Questions

Multiple researchers emphasize the impact a quality professional development can have on the administration of new standards and curriculum (Conley, Drummond, Gonzalez, Rooseboom, & Stout, 2011; Heck, Weiss, & Pasley, 2011; Liebtag, 2013; Marrongelle et al., 2013; Rothman, 2012). Understanding the impact of a quality professional development system is especially important for school districts supporting teachers with the CCSS, which encompass many instructional shifts for teachers in English language arts and mathematics. These changes in instructional practices include a large emphasis on becoming 21st-century literate, understanding how to navigate informational text, and learning how to cite evidence through writing and when having collaborative conversations (Pearson, 2013). As school districts begin to support teachers in the integration of the CCSS, professional development is a crucial component of successful enactment. Professional development research emphasizes the need for school districts to develop coherent, focused, and systematic professional development for teachers to use the CCSS effectively in their classrooms (Gibson & Brooks, 2012; Marrongelle et al., 2013). Marrongelle (2013) explained, "As teachers lead the way into the new Common Core, professional development becomes integral to the successful implementation of standards. In fact, the implementation of the CCSS hinges on the success of professional development" (p. 203).

There has been much research done on professional development, but there appears to be a gap in the literature about district-coordinated professional learning to support the CCSS implementation. This research gap is significant, as many districts "are the primary designers and deliverers of formal learning opportunities for teachers" (Firestone et al., 2005, p. 416). Furthermore, districts are the main source of budgetary funds and other resources to support professional development (Casey, 2013; Firestone, et al., 2005).

The guiding questions for this study addressed the Common Core Collaboration Grants for fourth- through sixth-grade teachers in supporting their implementation of the CCSS. A program evaluation of the MUSD CCCG for teachers in Grades 4–6 was conducted, and qualitative data for the program evaluation were collected through teacher interviews. The following guiding questions were the foundation for this program evaluation:

1. How did the MUSD CCCG support fourth- to sixth-grade teachers with the implementation of the CCSS?
2. As a result of participating in a MUSD CCCG, in the teachers' perceptions,
    a. How were teachers able to gain a better understanding of the CCSS?
    b. How were teachers able to effectively implement instructional strategies aligned with the CCSS?

Review of the Literature

This literature review was conducted to cover three major categories: (a) the theoretical framework related to this study, (b) literature that addresses effective

professional development, and (c) literature addressing the Common Core State Standards. Using electronic databases such as EBSCO Host, SAGE, ERIC, Education Research Complete, and ProQuest from the Walden online library and Google Scholar, I conducted searches with terms relevant to this study, as explained in the definitions section. Other related terms used for this search included *Common Core State Standards* and *effective professional development*. Searches for specific authors who had contributed to current and relevant research on professional development and the implementation of standards-based instruction yielded more sources for this literature review. Peer-reviewed journals and academic books also provided important sources for this review of literature. More than 50 academic books and peer-reviewed journals were found to contribute to this study. The remainder of this section includes subsections covering the theory of change, effective professional development, and implementation of the CCSS.

Theory of Change

The theoretical framework for this study was the theory of change. The theory of change is based on the concept of a social change initiative that has a foundation in strategic planning, evaluation, and ongoing decision making. The theory of change requires clear goals with measurable indicators of success and detailed actions to achieve goals (The Center for Theory of Change, 2013). Weiss (1995) described the theory of change as visually laying out a sequence of outcomes, implementing a plan, and using an evaluation strategy to determine the effectiveness of the results. This theoretical framework provided the structural basis of this research study.

Walker and Matarese (2011) noted in their study of the theory of change and its connection to human resource development that the theory of change involves looking for important connections between a program's activities, outcomes, and ultimate goals. Hernandez and Hodges (2006), in their study of community planning and social change, found that the theory of change allows for a community-level plan to become more than just a binder on a shelf. The theory of change allows for all participants involved to link the current resources and needs to an implementation plan focused on a positive impact on those the plan or program serves. The theory of change plays an important role in development and social program practice (Valters, 2014).

The theory of change framework "can provide a very powerful learning lens, which helps organizations ask themselves and others simple but important questions about what they are doing and why" (James, 2011, p. 3). The theory of change can further benefit participants and organizations as it helps in developing a common understanding; strengthens the effectiveness and focus of programs; provides a framework for monitoring, evaluation, and learning; improves partnerships with clear communication; and empowers people to become more involved and active (James, 2011, Valters, 2014). For this reason, the theory of change theoretical framework was chosen. This framework was appropriate for this study, as it provided the basis for change by facilitating a review of the goals/objectives of the program, evaluation of the effectiveness of the program, modification of the program based on the evaluation, and empowerment of the participants involved in the study.

Program Evaluation Framework

Killion & Roy (2009) found that "evaluation designs are based on what evaluators want to know and what they are evaluating" (p. 142). A program evaluation framework can help evaluators design an evaluation to better assess the program being evaluated. Killion and Roy (2009) outlined a conceptual framework for studying the effectiveness of professional development for teachers and the effect on student learning through their research and studies on collaborative professional learning. The conceptual framework outlined by Killion and Roy focuses on "core features of professional development such as content focus, active learning, coherence, duration and collective participation and their influence on increased teacher knowledge and skills, changes in attitudes and beliefs, changes in instructional practices and, ultimately, improved student learning" (p. 143). The conceptual framework on professional development makes it possible to move beyond looking at actions alone, enabling a focus on the results or outcomes of those actions on student learning.

To further the effectiveness of program evaluation frameworks, the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (JCSEE) developed a set of evaluation standards specifically designed for evaluating educational programs. The JCSEE published the third edition of the Standards for Evaluation of Educational Programs, Projects and Materials in 2014, also known as The Program Evaluation Standards. The Program Evaluation Standards are a guide for evaluating programs in the educational environment and can be applied to a variety of settings such as universities, schools, nonprofit organizations, and nongovernmental organizations. There are 30

standards "organized into five groups corresponding to five key attributes of evaluation quality: utility, feasibility, propriety, accuracy, and accountability" (Yarbrough, Shulha, Hopson, & Caruthers, 2014, p. xii). The Program Evaluation Standards were designed to identify and define evaluation quality while guiding evaluators in their endeavors toward a quality program evaluation. The program evaluation framework outlined by Killion and Roy (2009) and The Program Evaluation Standards were chosen and found to be appropriate for this study, as both the conceptual framework and standards provided a foundation for evaluating the effectiveness of the CCCG in supporting teachers with their implementation of the CCSS.

Effective Professional Development

Effective professional development can be defined as having the following characteristics: intensive, connected to school initiatives, ongoing, connected to practice, focused on teaching and learning within content areas, and conducive to the development of strong collegial relationships among teachers through collaboration (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Desimone, 2009; Francis & Jacobsen, 2013; Guskey &Yoon, 2009). The above characteristics of effective professional learning are found as a "consensus" among professional development researchers (Hill, Beisiegel, & Jacob, 2013). An extension of these core features includes the element of connecting practice to active engagement and learning for teachers, where teachers have multiple opportunities to receive feedback, analyze student work, observe classrooms, and make presentations of their knowledge to peers (Desimone, 2011). Education policy has also embedded these core elements as reflecting effective professional development. For example, under the

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, these essential elements of effective professional development have been included and highlighted. District initiatives should involve multiple opportunities for teachers to collaborate to further enhance their knowledge and application of new learning (Burke, 2013). This is especially important as Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (2011) found that "teachers learn by doing, reading, and reflecting (just as students do); by collaborating with other teachers; by looking closely at students and their work; and by sharing what they see" (p. 83).

Although researchers in the area of professional development have agreed to this common definition of effective professional development as it relates to improving student learning, several studies have indicated disappointing results when all or most of these elements have been included in a professional development program. For example, Arens et al. (2012), through their study of professional learning in relation to the language proficiency of elementary English learners, found no significant difference in instructional practices after teachers had participated in the professional development program. Another study conducted by Bos et al. (2012) focused on English learner professional development and found results similar to those of Arens et al. These study results are only a few examples of professional development programs that have not had the desired results even when they have encompassed all or most of the effective elements of professional development. Districts should be moving on from large-scale professional development studies at this important juncture when most professional development programs are being designed by local school districts based on their interests and are not being formally evaluated (Hill et al., 2013).

In the era of the CCSS, professional development is even more critical as teachers adjust to the instructional shifts within the CCSS (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012; Porter et al., 2011). When new standards and curricula are being implemented, professional development must allow for teachers to learn within context, increase their knowledge, and develop new instructional practices (Gibson & Brooks, 2012). As stated before by Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin and is worth repeating, "teachers learn by doing, reading, and reflecting (just as students do); by collaborating with other teachers; by looking closely at students and their work; and by sharing what they see" p. 83). These are all considerations a district must allow for when planning a professional development program.

In this current time of technology and the CCSS, professional development needs to be offered in a variety of formats. No longer is the traditional large group session at a set time the most effective approach; in fact, it is somewhat limited in terms of what can be accomplished (Brock & Carter, 2013; Casey, 2013; Kelcey & Phelps, 2013). Professional development opportunities centered around teacher study groups and reform-orientation activities are a preferable delivery mode, as these opportunities allow for teachers to be engaged in longer lasting professional development through more contact hours over a period of time (Burke, 2013; Killion & Roy, 2009). These various types of delivery modes allow for teachers to "collaborate both inside and outside of one another's classrooms and continually engage in dialogue to improve teaching and learning" (Burke, 2013, p. 250).

Common Core State Standards

Standards-based instruction was first implemented in California with the adoption of the 1997 California State Standards and Framework. The adoption of the 1997 California State Standards was the first adoption of statewide standards for California. The 1997 California State Standards were developed by the new California Standards Commission, whose members were appointed by the state superintendent, governor, and state legislature. In 1999, many legislative initiatives were aligned to the new standards, including budget allocations for new textbook adoptions aligned with the California State Standards and a new testing system, Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR; Becker & Jacob, 2000).

In 2010, the State of California adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) along with 42 other states (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2014). The CCSS was the result of the National Governor's Association (NGA) convening a governor's education policy advisory group in 2009 after a report, *Benchmarking for Success: Ensuring U.S. Students Receive a World-Class Education* by the NGA and Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), was released. The report recommended that states develop a common set of standards in English language arts and mathematics that was internationally benchmarked and that would equip students with the knowledge and skills necessary to be globally competitive (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2014). The CCSS are anchored in reflecting knowledge and skills necessary for students to be successful in careers and college, such as critical thinking, problem solving, collaborative discussion, and perseverance. A study conducted by Conley, Drummond, de

Gonzalez, Rooseboom, and Stout (2011) on the applicability and importance of the CCSS to college and career readiness found that the CCSS were applicable to a wide range of college readiness courses and that students participating in instruction aligned with the CCSS would be more prepared for postsecondary courses or a career path than students who were not involved in CCSS-aligned instruction.

The adoption of the CCSS has many implications for the State of California and the other states that have adopted the CCSS. Pearson (2013) reported in his evaluation of the CCSS that the CCSS represent unprecedented instructional shifts in the way teachers approach instruction in both language arts and mathematics. These shifts include rigorous content, application of knowledge through critical thinking and problem-solving skills, college and career readiness, collaborative discourse, comprehending as well as critiquing, citing text-based evidence in written and oral forms, and demonstrating academic independence (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012; Phillips & Wong, 2010; Porter et al., 2011).

With the adoption and implementation of the CCSS, several major challenges have appeared for local school districts, including a new accountability system related to students' progress toward meeting the CCSS and new instructional shifts and curriculum aligned to the CCSS (Darling-Hammond, Wilhoit, & Pittenger, 2014; Kober & Rentner, 2012; Lee, Liu, Amo, & Wang, 2013). Darling-Hammond et al. (2014) found that if meaningful learning is to occur for all students, then an accountability system must focus on a range of measures allowing for students to apply content knowledge and problem-solving skills. The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) assessment

system has been adopted by the State of California to develop assessments that provide those opportunities (SBAC, 2014). The SBAC summative assessment is comprised of performance tasks in both language arts and mathematics. The other component of the SBAC summative assessment is a series of questions that include a variety of question types such as constructed response, true/false, and multiple correct responses. These types of assessments, which provide performance tasks and question variety, offer students the opportunity to engage in real-world problem solving and allow teachers to gain more detailed information on how students think and can be used for more formative purposes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2014).

The new accountability system to measure students' progress toward the CCSS is just one challenge for districts and their implementation of the CCSS. The next difficulty is addressing the instructional shifts required when fully implementing the CCSS. District leaders need to understand that "in many ways implementation of the CCSS will raise the bar for what is expected of current and future teachers" (Liebtag, 2013, p. 62). These instructional shifts require major changes in classroom practices to help students engage in meeting the higher expectations of the CCSS. As Rothman (2012) and Liebtag (2013) found, many teachers are not prepared for these instructional shifts, and major professional development is required to support teachers in increasing their knowledge of the CCSS instructional shifts. The Center of Education Policy published two studies in 2011 and 2012 on states' progress and challenges in incorporating the CCSS. The 2011 survey focused on the first year of implementation of the CCSS, and the 2012 survey focused on the second year. Thirty-six states which adopted the CCSS were part of the

2011 survey study, and 33 of those states were part of the 2012 survey study. In the 2011 study, 33 states were making changes to their professional development programs and changing their curriculum guides and materials. All of the states were making changes to their state assessment systems. Fewer states were focusing changes on designing and pursuing teacher induction programs that would increase teachers' understanding of the CCSS. Twenty-two states were expecting districts to offer professional development for principals and teachers to support the CCSS, while 13 states were providing this professional learning at the state level. Only 17 states aligned teacher preparation programs with content focused around the CCSS. The 2011 study showed that 21 states found that developing teacher evaluation systems holding teachers accountable for using the CCSS in daily instruction would be a major challenge.

In the 2012 study by the Center of Education Policy, states were on their second year of applying the CCSS with 16 noting they didn't expect full administration until the 2014-2015 school year. The Center for Education Policy found 20 states noted that providing professional learning in sufficient quality and quantity to support teachers in implementing the CCSS as a major challenge and eight states found it as a minor challenge (Kober & Rentner, 2011; Marrongelle et al., 2013). These researchers found school districts would be challenged to provide quality professional development at an extent that provides teachers the opportunity to collaborate and build their knowledge of the CCSS instructional shifts. McLaughlin and Overturf (2012) in their study of implementing the CCSS at the elementary school level found the role of professional development in the integration of the CCSS into classroom practice was vital. They noted

teachers will need collaboration and planning time, a variety of instructional resources, andcontinuous and multiple opportunities for this type of professional development to be successful carrying out the CCSS (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012). These findings have implications for any school district coordinating professional development to support teachers with their use of the CCSS. Districts will need to understand the instructional shifts required for teachers to implement the CCSS and how to best support them through various professional development and collaboration offerings.

Implications

This program evaluation, which considered the impact of Common Core Collaboration Grants for teachers in Grades 4 through 6 to support the implementation of the CCSS within the Mattos Unified School District, examined how the MUSD CCCG supported teachers in successfully and effectively integrating the CCSS in lessons and units of study. This program evaluation comes at a crucial time as the MUSD has been providing the CCCG for almost two years but has never participated in a program evaluation. The MUSD will have one more year (2016/2017 school year) of funding for the CCCG before it needs to determine how to reallocate budget resources to either continue or discontinue the grants. This program evaluation helped the MUSD identify areas of strengths and needs and be able to make better decisions on allocating budget and personnel resources for the upcoming school years while also determining if the CCCG are accomplishing their intent. The program evaluation provided the opportunity to further the research on district funded teacher collaboration grants that support application of the CCSS in classroom instruction.

Implications for Social Change

This program evaluation study was designed to impact social change by examining how MUSD can best support teachers in the implementation of the CCSS to provide the global society with problem solvers that will positively impact the world. Positive social change is about making impactful changes not only within individuals but within the larger community. The CCSS provides the foundation for students to understand and learn how to formulate a problem, collect information necessary to solve the problem, how to communicate their arguments based on the evidence of their research, and to exercise precision and accuracy within their disciplines to present their research and arguments (Conley, 2011). By supporting teachers in collaborating and deepening their knowledge of the CCSS, it is helping to build future generations of problem solvers and critical thinkers ready to engage in careers that have yet to be developed due to the quickly changing global society.

Summary

The adoption of the CCSS by the State of California and 42 other states had major implications for students, teachers and local school districts (Marrongelle et al., 2013; Philips & Wong, 2010; Porter et al., 2011). The CCSS initiative required numerous changes in philosophy, curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Through the research conducted in this study, in order to implement the CCSS effectively, teachers will need effective professional development provided at the district level. Effective professional development for teachers includes: opportunities for teachers to collaborate and plan together; increase their understanding of the instructional shifts; participate in ongoing

opportunities; be active learners and observe other teachers; and have opportunities to get feedback on their own instructional practices (Desimone, 2011). This study showed the effectiveness of teacher collaboration time in increasing teacher's knowledge on the CCSS and the instructional shifts. The MUSD CCCG is a valuable opportunity and is worth continuing because of the opportunities for teacher collaboration time which deepens their understanding of the CCSS, the instructional shifts of the CCSS and how best to incorporate them into their lesson plans and units of study.

The following four sections include a description of this program evaluation. Section 1 examines the CCCG for teachers in MUSD supporting 4^{th} – 6^{th} grade teachers in the implementation of the CCSS, and to improve it for future implementation into area school districts and future school years. Section 2 includes the methodology of this program evaluation which includes: research design, setting and participants, data collection methods, instruments and materials, data collection process, data analysis, research findings and outcomes. Section 3 includes a description of the project, a program evaluation report along with presentation, and Section 4 consists of my reflections and conclusions of the study.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

A program evaluation allows for an examination of programs to determine their effectiveness to assist stakeholders in making programmatic decisions and to provide recommendations on improving programs (Spaulding, 2014). A program evaluation was necessary to assist Mattos Unified School District (MUSD) in determining the effectiveness of the Common Core Collaboration Grants (CCCG) in enhancing collaboration and the application of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The following describes the research design and approach for the program evaluation and includes a description of the participants, the data collection and analysis process, and finally the data analysis results of this study.

Research Design and Approach

For this study, a qualitative design was chosen to develop a greater understanding of how the CCCG have supported fourth- to sixth-grade teachers in the implementation of the CCSS in elementary schools. Qualitative research design provides an opportunity for the researcher to go in greater depth with a study and allows for deeper exploration and opportunities to learn more from the participants through information and insight gained from the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2012). Maykut and Morehouse (1994) pointed out that qualitative research "generally examines people's words and actions in narrative or descriptive ways more closely representing the situation experienced by the participants" (p. 3). A quantitative design would not have provided the in-depth research required for this study, as it would only have used observable data

in numeric form, and a statistical analysis technique would not have provided for a deeper look into the topic or perspectives on the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009).

Specifically, this study design used a qualitative program evaluation grounded in the Killion and Roy conceptual framework on planning and evaluating effective professional learning and incorporated the program evaluation standards developed by JCSEE (2014) within the framework. A qualitative program evaluation "examines programs to determine their worth and to make recommendations for programmatic refinement and success" (Lodico et al., 2010, p. 317). A program evaluation was chosen because this study design has the purpose of focusing on one program and determining its effectiveness (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010). This qualitative program evaluation examined the effectiveness of the CCCG, which are focused on supporting fourth- to sixth-grade teachers in the application of CCSS in their daily lessons. With a program evaluation, "wise decisions can be made on budget allocations and program planning" (Weiss, 1972, p. 3). The program evaluation assisted in determining the effectiveness of the CCCG in supporting teachers with their use of the CCSS through collaboration and professional development time. The qualitative analysis encompassed collecting data from all schools within the local school district. The qualitative program evaluation was a formative approach, as the purpose of the program evaluation was to determine, from the teachers' perspective, whether the district-funded CCCG supported them in their implementation of the CCSS. The formative approach allowed for data to be gathered and reported upon in a timely manner and as the program was taking place. The overall

evaluation goal of the formative program evaluation was to determine the effectiveness of the CCCG in supporting fourth- to sixth-grade teachers in carrying out the CCSS within their daily classroom instruction. Lodico et al. (2010) pointed out that the goal of formative evaluations "is to change or make better the thing that is being studied" (p. 318), and this was the purpose and goal of this study and research.

Participants

The setting for this qualitative study was the Mattos Unified School District (MUSD; pseudonym). The participants for this study were selected from the designated school district, MUSD, which serves approximately 8,600 students in transitional kindergarten through Grade 12. The study included seven teachers in Grades 4 through 6, selected from eight elementary schools within MUSD that participated in the CCCG. The teachers met with me at a time of their choosing, either after school or on weekends, so as not to impact classroom instruction time. The participants for this study were chosen using a purposeful sampling method; specifically, the participants were a homogeneous sampling of fourth- through sixth-grade teachers who participated in the MUSD CCCG. A purposeful sampling method allowed me an opportunity to choose participants who used the CCCG offered by MUSD as part of the district-coordinated professional development program and who were able to offer more insight to better explore the research questions (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010). By keeping the sample size small, I was able to have a more in-depth inquiry (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007). The sample size allowed for more time with each participant and the ability to provide a deeper analysis of the data collected. If more participants had been added to the study, the study

might have "become unwieldy and result[ed] in superficial perspectives" (Creswell, 2012, p. 209).

Access to the participants was obtained through affiliation in the same organization: MUSD. The participants and I interacted on a sporadic basis through various structured district activities such as district-wide meetings, professional development sessions, and site-based meetings. I conversed with many of the participants via email, and through activities and emails, I began establishing a relationship with them. In order to gain a letter of cooperation from the superintendent of MUSD, I met with the superintendent and shared with him the research proposal and discussed the purpose of attaining his support for the study. The Walden University IRB approval #02-16-16-0388354, along with a letter of cooperation from the superintendent of MUSD, allowed the data collection process to move forward. No data were collected nor were teachers approached until approval was received from these two entities.

Once approval was granted, the selected teachers were sent an introductory email outlining the purpose and requirements of the study, along with an invitation to participate. This introductory email also included a consent letter for their review. Once teachers joined the study, they were provided the purpose and requirements of the study in hard copy with the informed consent letter. Two copies of the informed consent letter were provided, one copy for participants to keep for their records and a copy to sign and return to me with the postage-paid envelope provided. I kept the signed consent forms with my records to confirm their willingness to participate. The informed consent letter included all measures taken to ensure participants' confidentiality.

When participants accepted the invitation to participate in the study, confidentiality was maintained by providing code names to all participants to ensure their anonymity. The participants were separated by grade level and school site. The material gathered (i.e., interview materials and notes) has been stored at my place of residence in a locked cabinet to which only I have access, where it will remain for a period of 5 years (Creswell, 2012). I had no supervisory or evaluative authority over the participants, and participation in this study did not jeopardize their roles or positions in any way within the district.

Data Collection

According to Merriam (2009), interviews are the most predominant form of data collection in qualitative research and are necessary when researchers are unable to observe feelings or how people interpret events or activities around them. Merriam further explained that interviews are conversations that have a focus and purpose and allow the collection of special kinds of information. There are various types of interviews, ranging from one-to-one interviews to focus groups to electronic interviews. The data for this study consisted of individual interviews with the seven selected fourth- to sixth-grade teachers who participated in the CCCG. The interviews followed a semi structured protocol to allow for questions to be used flexibly but also allow for specific data to be collected from all respondents (Merriam, 2009). The interviews provided the necessary data required to answer the research questions that were the foundation of this study (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). The interviews were conducted with the participants outside their work hours at agreed-upon dates and times at the convenience

of the participants and at locations of the participants' choosing, such as a local coffee house or café in close proximity to the school. Each interview followed the interview protocol, which can be found in Appendix B.

The source of the interview questions was Killion and Roy's (2009) framework on planning and evaluating effective professional learning. All interviews were conducted in an environment conducive to interviewing and in which the participant could feel comfortable sharing information, such as a local coffee house or cafe. Interviews were each approximately 40–60 minutes. Interviews were recorded using a digital audio recorder. Other equipment present during the interviews included a laptop computer, an interview protocol, note paper, and writing utensils. Additionally, field notes were written during interviews to supplement the digital recording of the interviews.

Data were collected during the interviews with a digital audio recorder. During transcription of the interviews, participants' names were replaced with a coding system to ensure anonymity (i.e. 1PA = Participant 1). Each participant had a unique file and was provided a copy of draft findings to review and ensure accuracy of the data collected to support the findings, along with an opportunity to discuss the findings with me. Member checks and an external audit were used to further ensure dependability of the data collected and to ensure my objectivity as the researcher (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010). Member checks allow researchers to "check their findings with participants in the study to determine if their findings are accurate" (Creswell, 2012, p. 258). An external audit furthered the credibility of the data collected, as an external audit allows for "an

individual outside the study to review different aspects of the research" (Creswell, 2012, p. 260). The external auditor was provided with all of the data collected to check for logical development of themes and findings. The data collected have been stored on my personal computer, which is protected by a secure password.

As the researcher, I was responsible for ensuring the dependability and validity of the data collected. During this study, I was consistently aware of researcher bias, and to ensure that I added no undue influence during the interviews, I kept my interactions objective and my voice calm at all times.

Data Analysis

In order to ensure that no information was lost between the interviews, transcription happened as soon as possible after each interview (Creswell, 2012). During transcription, I looked for different segments in the data. This first step allowed for an exploratory analysis of the data collected. As these different segments of data were identified, coding began. In the initial phase of the coding, I broke down the data into themes or categories that were understandable and manageable (Lodico et al., 2010). Once the themes or categories had been identified, a deeper analysis occurred through more analytical coding, in which I looked for deeper meaning within the data collected (Merriam, 2009; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Hatch (2002) noted that "qualitative data analysis involves a deductive dimension" (p. 10) and further explained that "as patterns or relationships are discovered in the data, hypothetical categories are formed, and the data are then read deductively to determine if these categories are supported by the overall data set" (p.10).

To ensure validity and reliability, member checks and an external audit were used (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010). Each participant was asked to review a draft of findings to ensure accuracy and dependability of the data collected. The draft of findings was emailed to each participant in a .pdf format, and participants were provided the opportunity to discuss the findings and their data with me at a scheduled time of their choosing. The external audit was conducted by an outside colleague who was able to provide a thorough review of the data to check for logical development of themes and findings. The auditor reported back on any weaknesses or strengths in the development of the findings. An external audit was conducted during the research and at the conclusion of the study. Through member checking and the external audit, only minor changes in phrasing were made.

Limitations

There may have been several limitations to this qualitative study. As this study focused solely on the CCCG in the MUSD and the sample was small in number, a limitation of this study may have been the inability to transfer the findings to other school districts. A way to address this issue of transferability is to include a sufficient amount of descriptive data within the findings. The program evaluation was designed to be formative and may only have evaluated the progress the CCCG made up until the point at which the interviews were conducted. Finally, another possible limitation was participants' concern with anonymity and the confidentiality of the study; this concern may have caused participants not to answer truthfully regarding their perspectives on the CCCG.

Data Analysis Results

For this qualitative program evaluation, 13 emails were sent to fourth- to sixth-grade teachers in MUSD who participated in the CCCG, inviting them to participate in this study. The emails included an introduction to the study and a consent letter to ensure that each participant understood the purpose and requirements of the study. Of the 13 selected participants, seven responded affirmatively and gave their consent to participate in the study. Each participant was sent two hard copies of the consent letter, one to sign and one to keep for the participant's records. The signed consent letter was returned in a postage-paid envelope, which was provided to each participant. Once each signed consent letter was received, one-on-one interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the participants. All seven one-on-one interviews were conducted over a 4-week period in various locations, depending on each participant's needs. Each interview lasted approximately 40–60 minutes and followed a semi structured protocol (Appendix B). Interviews were recorded using a digital recording device and were transcribed the same day. Member checks and an external audit were used to ensure validity and reliability (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010). The external audit was conducted by an outside colleague who was able to provide a thorough review of the data to check for logical development of themes and findings. In addition, each participant was asked to review a draft of findings to ensure the accuracy and dependability of the data collected.

The purpose of this study was to determine how the MUSD CCCG supported teachers in their implementation of the CCSS. Prior to reading through each transcribed interview, I returned to the original research questions:

1. How did the MUSD CCCG support fourth- to sixth-grade teachers with the implementation of the CCSS?
2. As a result of participating in a MUSD CCCG, in the teachers' perceptions,
    a. How were teachers able to gain a better understanding of the CCSS?
    b. How were teachers able to effectively implement instructional strategies aligned with the CCSS?

In order to answer the above research questions, each participant was asked the following questions:

1. Based upon your previous experience with regular school professional development used prior to the use of the current model, how effective do you believe the Common Core Collaboration Grants program has been in supporting your implementation of the Common Core State Standards? Please explain.
2. Prior to the Common Core Collaboration Grants, how did the district support your implementation of the Common Core State Standards?
3. How has the Common Core Collaboration Grants program supported your implementation of the Common Core State Standards?
4. How has the Common Core Collaboration Grants program supported your implementation of CCSS-aligned instructional strategies?
5. How do you feel the Common Core Collaboration Grants help expand your understanding of the Common Core State Standards?

6. What aspects of the Common Core Collaboration Grants need to be improved?
7. How does the Common Core Collaboration Grants program compare to previous types of professional development in preparing you to teach the Common Core State Standards?

Once interviews were transcribed, I began to read through each interview to first look for themes and break down the data in order to answer the research questions. Utilizing the conceptual framework developed for evaluating professional development by Killion and Roy (2009), the initial coding involved underlining and making notes in the margins to identify overarching categories or themes (Lodico et al., 2010). The program evaluation framework by Killion and Roy focused on the core features of the professional development, how it increased teacher's knowledge, changed instruction, and ultimately improved student learning. These concepts were applied to the initial coding and note taking in the data analysis. After the first coding was completed, a second and third analysis was done for a more analytical coding identifying deeper meaning within the data collected (Merriam, 2009). Using the program evaluation framework, the codes applied to the interview questions included: choice, collaboration, time, and CCSS. The codes were categorized incorporating the following themes: teacher choice, time, collaboration, and understanding and integration of the CCSS.

Theme 1: Teacher Choice

From the very first question each participant mentioned the term "choice" throughout their answers. Choice meant several different definitions to each participant:

choice in what they focused on and when, and choice in whom they were working with. Researchers in adult learning theory found that choice is an important element in adult learning and is important when designing professional development for teachers (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2015). This concept is supported when Participant 2 stated, "Because I was able to choose areas that were relevant and of interest to me, I was a motivated learner." Participant 4 communicated that by being able to pick a topic/subject area they were interested in, the CCCG allowed them to delve into the mechanics of it and work with a colleague who was also interested in the subject area. Participant 5 said the CCCG, "allowed teachers the flexibility to identify needs, work together, research, and problem-solve." Participant 7 noted with the CCCG the teachers were given the purpose to the professional development versus a presenter or administrator telling them what to do. Participant 3 mentioned the CCCG was, "unique from other Common Core professional development in that they are teacher driven." From Participant 1's perspective the CCCG allowed teachers to choose site specific content and needs along with choosing their own team thus creating a higher engagement level. Participant 2 corroborated this data through the statement, "Because I had a part in choosing what I was working on, I was more motivated and focused."

Theme 2: Time

Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (2011) discuss the importance of teachers being allowed time to collaborate with other teachers, time to read, and time to learn within their own context. In the data collected for this study, time was referenced in the following ways: being able to have time to collaborate with colleagues; time to read and

research the CCSS; time to conduct lesson studies; time to develop lessons and units aligned with the CCSS; time to pull resources and learn from colleagues; and time to be flexible. Participant 1 stated, "just gave us the time that we needed," this corresponded with Participant 2 who stated, "The major support was the time provided to align the instructional strategies with the CCSS." Other statements around the theme time were:

Participant 3:

> I realize this is a reoccurring theme, but in order for implementation of the CCSS to be effective, teachers truly need time. Transition to the Common Core requires us to adjust our teaching practices. That means looking at our current instruction with a critical eye. We need to be informed about what it means to transition to the new standards as well as the time to research and practice our current instructional strategies to support the Common Core. At one collaboration meeting, we watched exemplar videos of Common Core being taught in the classroom. These types of experiences are critical to our growth as educators, and the time we use to do this is important work is finally being compensated by our district though the CCCG.

Participant 4: "I felt the grants gave me the time to understand the standards. By getting the grants, I felt the district was validating my time. I would use the time wisely and also make the time to work with my grant teammates."

Participant 6: "Having the time to research and read about best practices made a huge difference."

Participant 7:

> Time would be the last factor. In professional development classes your time is based on the presenter, and often is not convenient. With the grants the flexibility in setting times that are most effective for my schedule has made me more focused during my work times. The CCCG has given me time to learn the CCSS while creating lessons that are meaningful to my students' academic needs.

Theme 3: Collaboration

The focus of the collaboration theme was around being provided collaboration time to meet with colleagues in the same grade level and in vertical grade level teams; working with peers and learning their different perspectives; alignment of instructional practices; and being able to collaborate with teachers who had like needs in their classrooms. Forte and Forte (2014) discuss the importance of teacher collaboration in improving instructional practices within the classroom and increasing student learning. Teacher collaboration has also been found to increase collegiality and improving self efficacy of teachers (Kutsyrubua, 2013). In the data collected for this study, Participant 1 stated, "Collaboration spreads a larger vision for the school vs. just one person going to a one time professional development session." Participant 2 noted being provided the opportunity to "share their expertise with their colleagues is often the most valuable professional development to me." Other comments regarding collaboration were: Participant 3: "Our collaboration time to go through this process acted as a holistic professional development to hone our pedagogical practices around CCSS instruction."

Participant 6: “Spending so much time collaborating with another teacher on the very same project is unique to the collaboration grants and proved to be huge in terms of increasing our understanding of the CCSS.”

Participant 5: “The grants have helped me go even further beyond what I think I’m looking for. I discover many resources and inspiration from others in our district.”

Theme 4: Understanding and Integration of the CCSS

The final theme from the data collected through the teacher interviews were around understanding and integrating the CCSS in daily instruction. McLaughlin and Overturf (2012) discussed the importance of providing professional development focused on the integration of the CCSS into daily instructional practices because of the complicated nuances of the instructional shifts within the CCSS. In the data collected for this study, teachers cited the CCCG allowed them the time to delve deeper into understanding the CCSS, design lessons around the CCSS, and develop instructional strategies aligned with the instructional shifts of the CCSS particularly around ensuring student success. Participant 5 stated, “By increasing our understanding of the CCSS through the CCCG, it was much easier to differentiate this project and to scaffold the research and presentations to help each student be successful.” Participant 4 cited, “In developing a project through the grant, I had to understand the standard and what went into teaching it.” Participant 4 further explained, “I understand the CCSS better thus design different instructional strategies that will work with the students and the projects.” The following are further statements supporting the theme of increasing teacher understanding of the CCSS:

Participant 3: “In addition to aligning expected outcomes to the standards, we then went on to align our lesson/activity to the appropriate materials and, ultimately, a quality assessment to help us evaluate if the learning objective was met.”

Participant 6:

> By creating the actual curriculum to teach the CCSS I found I had far greater knowledge of the standards themselves. The research we did made a major impact on my understanding of the shift in pedagogy necessary to teach the CCSS. I am not confident that would have happened in a workshop with someone telling me. Having the time to research and read about best practices made a huge difference.

Participant 7:

> With my teammates on the grants we were able to look at how the standards expand vertically so that we made sure students were able to build on previous knowledge at each grade level. This made me more aware of what was needed and expected at the other grade levels. Within building projects to help expand knowledge I was also able to see how I can fit many of the standards together in an assignment.

CCCG Improvements

Question 6 of the interview protocol focused on understanding the perspectives of the teachers on how the CCCG could be improved upon. Several of the participants suggested including a central location for teachers to reference and view final products and options of what other grant groups have worked on. Participant 1 stated, “Having a

place to house all of your documents and resources, final product you are working on and being able to share with everyone would be beneficial." Participant 3 commented,

> I wonder if offering collaboration grants with themes such as RTI, Aligning to the California Frameworks, Response to the Achievement Gap, Meeting the needs of gifted students in the regular classroom would be part of an improvement. Perhaps teachers could choose their collaboration focus from a list provided by the district.

Publicity was another area of improvement cited by participants. Participant 2 stated, "It would be helpful if more people were aware of the grants. In the beginning the guidelines were somewhat murky, but the procedures became clearer as we progressed." Participant 6 corroborated with this sentiment through the statement,

> All I can think of is increasing publicity of the grants. Possibly increase reminders to teachers that they are available. Maybe it would be helpful to have every workshop end with the presenter mentioning the availability of the grants, be able to answer questions about them and possibly offer ideas or examples of past grants. I think constant publicity is needed because we all get so busy we forget about them.

Findings

Based upon the data collected during the interviews, I was able to understand through the teacher's perspectives how the CCCG supported them in implementing the CCSS and answer the guiding research questions of this study. The first guiding research question asked how did the MUSD CCCG support Grades 4through6 grade teachers with

the implementation of the CCSS. Participants felt the MUSD CCCG supported teachers in implementing the CCSS in various ways. First the CCCG allowed them the time to collaborate with colleagues within their grade level and in vertical grade level teams. According to adult learning theory foundations and concepts adults are more motivated to learn when they are able to have choice and are able to be self-directing in time, learning pace and location of the learning (Knowles et al., 2015). The participants found value and meaningfulness through their involvement in the CCCG by being able to have choice in their teams and focus. As Participant 1 stated,

> Choosing your own team also allowed you to be able to go a little further. Normal professional development opportunities you don't have that option and some personalities may not allow you to go as far as you would like to go with the material. Not everyone on the team may be excited about everything.

Participant 7 further elaborated that the grants allowed for "collaborating with teachers who had like needs in their rooms or interests in the curriculum, so that we were on the same page, not just biding time in a meeting." Another foundation of adult learning theory relevant is the concept of valuing and respecting the learner's experience, perspective and knowledge (Knowles et al., 2015). Participant 2 explained, "The grant allowed our site to create a team made up of a variety of teachers and specialists who rarely have the opportunity to work together. The different perspectives and experiences created a rich learning environment and benefited the site as a whole." Through a study on human resource development, Mancuso, Chlup and McWhorter (2010) found the "flexibilities allow for learning at own time and space and allow for lifelong learning" (p.

692), thus showing the need for teachers to have the opportunity to create flexibility and time within their professional development. The CCCG allowed teachers the flexibility to determine when they could meet with their teams and for how long. Teachers also felt the CCCG provided them the opportunity to choose the focus area of their work thus creating more engagement and motivation to complete the task.

However, choice and flexibility were not the only key elements found in the data, collaboration was also an important factor in how participants felt the CCCG supported them in implementing the CCSS. Collaboration has many benefits and has been included as a critical component in the definition of effective professional development. In fact, researchers define effective professional development as being ongoing, focused on teaching and learning and include multiple opportunities for collaboration (Francis & Jacobsen, 2013; Guskey & Yoon, 2009). Through this study it was found that the CCCG allowed teachers the opportunity to meet and collaborate with other teachers within their grade levels, across grade levels and across school sites multiple times and over the course of a school year. Burke (2013) discussed the importance of allowing teachers multiple opportunities to meet in teacher centered groups that are focused on activities that create change in their instructional practices and that are continuous and ongoing to ensure change. In fact, Participant 6 noted, "These grants are a concrete example of how to create motivated, engaged teachers who are eager to do their very best for kids." Traditionally professional development sessions do not include an opportunity for teachers to engage in collaborating on subject areas that are meaningful and relevant to them or of their choice. The CCCG provided the opportunity for teachers to meet

regularly with a team of their choosing on a focus area that was related to their needs and within their own contexts, therefore, creating lifelong learners that are motivated and engaged in deepening their knowledge, and engaging in positive change to their instructional practices.

Finally, the teachers felt the CCCG created the opportunity for them to delve deeper into the CCSS, develop aligned lessons, units of study and instructional strategies to help their students become more successful in mastering the CCSS. Collaboration at its highest level includes teacher design teams or lesson study teams focused on analyzing standards, lessons and instructional practices (Seo & Han, 2013). With the need for teachers to understand the content of the CCSS and the instructional shifts within the CCSS, districts often neglect to allow the time for teachers to meet and collaborate together. Killion & Roy (2009) suggested that effective professional learning needs to include all teachers working in teams and focused on specific areas of need to increase student learning. Participant 3 corroborated the research and articulated well the findings in this study by stating,

> The CCCG have supported my implementation of CCSS aligned instructional strategies by allowing my colleagues and me the time and encouragement to deeply consider all of the components of our lesson/s. We began our planning by considering the expected student outcomes for our standards of focus. From there, we unpacked the standards to determine what skills we wanted our students to master in order to achieve these outcomes. In addition to aligning expected outcomes to the standards, we then went on to align our lesson/activity to the

> appropriate materials and, ultimately, a quality assessment to help us evaluate if the learning objective was met. Clearly, we did not have ample collaboration time to do a quality job of this process without the addition of our CCCG time. Alignment is critical, and in the end it was our students who most benefitted. This includes our future students as well, as our collaboration time to go through this process acted as a holistic professional development to hone our pedagogical practices around CCSS instruction.

As noted by this participant and explained in the research, quality collaboration can't be done in just one meeting; it must be developed over time and within multiple opportunities. The CCCG provided the occasion for teachers to collaborate and deepen their knowledge through the analysis and studying of the CCSS.

The second guiding research question asked how the teachers were able to obtain a better understanding of the CCSS and implement instructional strategies aligned with the CCSS through their participation in the CCCG. Based upon the data collected, teachers felt that because they had the time and chance to collaborate with other staff members they were able to research more deeply the CCSS and aligned instructional strategies to gain a better understanding. According to Fullan (2016), building capacity among teachers and within school sites is important when implementing innovation and a change in practices. The CCCG focused on deepening teacher knowledge through providing sources of support among colleagues and building capacity. Normally, school sites have pockets of excellence but when providing time and support for collaboration those pockets of excellence become larger and cause an increase in student learning

(Killion & Roy, 2009). Not only does Participant 3 clearly explain this above but Participant 6 states,

> we worked on a fraction unit for 5th grade that included all of the fraction standards which a major area of focus for the CCSS in 5th grade. Not only did I walk away with a complete unit that addressed all of the fraction standards but I felt I really understood the profound difference in how the CCSS must be taught compared to the old state standards.

Through this more in depth understanding the teachers felt they were better able to design lessons, projects and units of study aligned with the CCSS, and incorporate engaging instructional strategies to ensure student success. Participant 6 stated, "The research we did made a major impact on my understanding of the shift in pedagogy necessary to teach the CCSS. Having the time to research and read about best practices made a huge difference." The teachers also felt the CCCG provided them the time to share resources and knowledge with their colleagues to enhance everyone's understanding and ability to implement the CCSS while building capacity among teachers.

Another notable finding, based upon the data, were teachers felt the ability to have follow-up conversations increased their effectiveness in implementing aligned CCSS instructional strategies. Follow-up conversations is part of the peer instructional coaching cycle that involves reflective conversations focused on implementing an instructional strategy in the classroom (Zepeda, Parylo, & Ilgan, 2013). The reflective conversations that occur between peers provide the opportunity for teachers to learn

within their own context and receive feedback on their implementation. Participant 2 discussed how the CCCG allowed them "time testing strategies, discussing the outcomes, and altering them to better meet the needs of the students and the requirements of the standards." Traditional professional development sessions lack this element; however, the CCCG provided the opportunity for feedback and allowed for teachers to receive feedback from their peers within a collaborative environment.

A final important finding that stemmed from the data collected and went beyond the guiding research questions were the ways to improve the CCCG. Teachers recommended increasing the publicity of the CCCG so teachers are always aware of the opportunities. Participant 6 suggested, "Possibly increase reminders to teachers the grants are available. Maybe it would be helpful to have every workshop end with the presenter mentioning the availability of the grants, be able to answer questions about them and possibly offer ideas or examples of past grants." Participant 2 further corroborated this recommendation by stating, "It would be helpful if more people were aware of the grants." Other improvements included having a menu of choices/options of topics for grants and to have a central location for all products of past grants for all teachers to view and use. Participant 1 provided the feedback of "having a place to house all of your documents and resources, final products to share with everyone and to see a menu of products and what other grade level groups have done." The teachers wanted as many teachers to be aware of the CCCG and to have a central reference point for all grant products to be utilized. The final finding for improving the CCCG centered on increasing the amount of time available for each CCCG. Participant 4 stated "A longer term grant

would be great. A teacher then can design a whole unit, work with colleagues both vertically and horizontally, and have the opportunity for a full lesson study with feedback from colleagues."

Summary

With the 2010 adoption of the CCSS, an unprecedented instructional shift was created in the approach to instruction in mathematics and language arts (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012). Some of these shifts included: collaborative discourse, critical thinking and problem solving skills, comprehending and critiquing citing text based evidence, along with demonstrating academic independence (Porter et al., 2011). The implementation of the CCSS requires effective professional development provided at the district level to support teachers in their application of the CCSS. This professional learning should provide opportunities for teachers to collaborate and plan together, participate in ongoing activities, and be active learners (Desimone, 2011).

The purpose of this study was to determine how the MUSD CCCG supported teachers in incorporating the CCSS into their daily classroom instruction. I used a qualitative program evaluation design to gain information on how the MUSD CCCG supported teachers in utilizing the CCSS. The program evaluation framework used within this study was based on the theory of change and looked at the core features of professional development. The framework provided guidance in analyzing the themes and understanding how the CCCG increased teacher knowledge, impacted instruction and student learning. In this study, I found that the MUSD CCCG supported teachers with the integration of the CCSS into daily lessons and units of study by providing them the time,

opportunity, and ability to collaborate with colleagues to deepen their understanding of the CCSS and aligned instructional practices. The data taken from these interviews helped to provide a program evaluation report of the MUSD CCCG.

The following section will describe the project, a program evaluation report and presentation for the Board of Education and stakeholders. The presentation includes insights, improvements and recommendations regarding the future of the MUSD CCCG. The project included an accompanying PowerPoint presentation for the Board of Education and stakeholders.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The 2010 adoption of the CCSS began a movement of changing instructional practices across California classrooms to meet the needs of the 21st century and beyond. With this change, challenges arose in providing effective professional development to support teachers with their implementation of the CCSS (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012). MUSD implemented a multi tiered professional development system to support teachers with their implementation of the CCSS. One component of this professional development system was the Common Core Collaboration Grants (CCCG). This project study was a qualitative program evaluation to provide the research and information MUSD will need to determine the effectiveness of the CCCG and make future decisions on supporting teachers and how to best allocate resources.

The project study consisted of seven interviews with current fourth- to sixth-grade teachers who participated in the MUSD CCCG to ascertain their perceptions of how the CCCG supported their implementation of the CCSS. The data findings in Section 2 indicate that definitive components of the MUSD CCCG supported teachers in implementing the CCSS. In addition, I was able to gather information on what improvements could be made to the CCCG. The capstone project associated with the program evaluation is an evaluation report and a presentation to the board of education and stakeholders to share the results of the program evaluation. This section includes a description of the project, the goals and rationale for the project, a review of literature

that supported project development, the implementation timeline, and implications for positive social change.

Proposed Project Goals

The goals for this project are outlined below:

1. Provide teachers increased opportunities to collaborate with colleagues to accomplish the following:
    a. Increase their understanding of the CCSS.
    b. Design units of study and daily lessons incorporating the CCSS.
    c. Provide meaningful professional development opportunities aligned with adult learning theory.
2. Integrate the CCCG with school and district-wide initiatives and peer instructional coaching.
3. Provide online collaboration tools that allow all participants in the CCCG to share resources and final products.

These project goals were based on the data analysis results for this program evaluation. The following section provides the rationale for the project goals through the description of the data analysis results from Section 2.

Proposed Project Goal 1: Provide teachers Increased Opportunities to Collaborate With Colleagues

Study participants clearly indicated that collaboration time was one of the most meaningful professional development opportunities provided to them. They appreciated the time that the CCCG provided them to work with colleagues on diving deeper into the

CCSS to understand the expectations of the standards and how to integrate them into lessons, units of study, and aligned instructional strategies. Participants also expressed the amount of choice provided through the CCCG as beneficial because they were allowed to choose who they collaborated with and what standard and content area they focused on. However, many of the participants indicated that an increased amount of collaboration time would be necessary for more in-depth areas of focus. Expansion of the topics and areas of focus for the collaboration grants were also recommended. Research analysis suggested that the CCCG needed to offer increased amounts of time depending on the scope of work for the grant project and that the areas of focus for the CCCG needed to be expanded. These problems will be addressed through the content of the evaluation report and presentation by providing recommendations based on research and the findings of this study.

Proposed Project Goal 2: Integrate the CCCG with School and District-Wide Initiatives and Peer Instructional Coaching

Some study participants stated that the CCCG allowed them to choose site-specific content and needs to focus on for their grant work. Several participants also noted the positive impact made on their learning when they were able to collaborate and research with their colleagues. Although the CCCG provides these opportunities, there is still a need to expand the CCCG into school and district-wide initiatives consistently, and to integrate the CCCG into the peer instructional coaching model. Study participants recommended this expansion into other district-wide initiatives. In addition, the research analysis suggested that integration into the peer-instructional coaching model would

increase the transferability of knowledge gained through the CCCG into daily instructional practices. This problem will be addressed through the recommendations presented in the evaluation report and presentation.

Proposed Project Goal 3: Provide Online Collaboration Tools for All Participants in the CCCG to Share Resources and Final Products

Study participants were able to share resources and knowledge gained through this research within their collaborative grant teams. Several participants appreciated being able to build their instructional tool box through the sharing process of collaboration. A few participants shared their desire to be able to learn what other CCCG participants were working on, what resources they were collecting, and the final products developed through the CCCG. The program evaluation research suggested the addition of a central online location to house all of the various topics of ongoing CCCG work, including the resources collected and the final products developed through the CCCG projects. This central location should be an online tool easily accessible to all CCCG participants and non participants to foster a collaborative community among all teachers.

Rationale

The following project genres were explored for this project study: a formative evaluation with a report and presentation and a summative evaluation with report. A program evaluation can be both formative and summative. A summative program evaluation provides for an evaluation report at the end of a program, when the program has already been concluded. A summative program evaluation does not allow for changes or modifications to be made to a program that would make the program more

effective (Spaulding, 2014). A formative program evaluation is designed to collect data during the program and offer insights as to how the program can be modified or changed (Creswell, 2012). A formative approach to program evaluation using the program evaluation framework for professional development designed by Killion and Roy (2009) was the most appropriate choice for this project study, as MUSD would be able to use the findings on how the CCCG were supporting teachers in order to make timely and informed decisions on resource allocation.

A qualitative program evaluation provides the descriptive narrative from participating stakeholders necessary to understand the implications a program has had on meeting the intended goals (Creswell, 2012). The qualitative data collected and analyzed revealed the teachers' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the CCCG and ways in which they could be improved. Given that MUSD is only in Year 3 of implementing the CCCG, this project study is timely to allow for improvements to be made to the program and decisions regarding future resource allocations. The findings and outcomes of this program evaluation highlight an effective approach to improving the MUSD CCCG. Additionally, the program evaluation report and presentation offer the opportunity for MUSD personnel to consider the implications of the study for other district initiatives and the professional development necessary to carry those initiatives forward.

Review of the Literature

The theoretical framework for this project was based on the theory of change and the program evaluation framework outlined by Killion and Roy (2009) for studying the effectiveness of professional development for teachers. I conducted a secondary literature

review to support the use of a program evaluation, program evaluation report, and presentation as a genre for this study. The literature review was expanded to include dimensions that enhance teacher professional development based on the Section 2 findings that support the proposed recommendations within the program evaluation report and presentation.

The review of literature includes (a) how a program evaluation report and presentation were appropriate to share the findings of the program evaluation of the MUSD CCCG and (b) a review of the literature on enhancements to teacher professional development based on the recommendations from Section 2. This literature review resulted in a Boolean search in four main areas: program evaluation, teacher collaboration, adult learning theories, and peer instructional coaching. I specifically searched for research centered on professional development program evaluation and the CCSS. I used the Walden University Library database and Google Scholar for a majority of the research, using the databases ERIC, ProQuest, EBSCO Host, SAGE, and Education Research Complete. Additionally, I used my ASCD membership to access more peer-reviewed articles on these topics. Academic books and peer-reviewed journals also provided important sources for this literature review.

Program Evaluations and Reports

There are many types of program evaluations; Mertens and Wilson (2012) found 27 different types. All of these different types of program evaluations can be broken down into studying needs, process, or outcome and efficiency (Posavac, 2016). Studies of need focus on identifying and measuring unmet needs within an organization. These

types of evaluations are done before any program is developed (Posavac, 2016). Once a program has begun, then a program evaluation examining the process is conducted. This formative type of program evaluation assesses the effectiveness of the program and allows for adjustment or modifications to be made to the program to enhance effectiveness (Mertens & Wilson, 2012; Posavac, 2016). A program evaluation that examines the outcomes and impact of a particular program and provides a summary evaluation report at the conclusion of the program focuses on the outcomes and efficiency of the program (Mertens & Wilson, 2012). This type of program evaluation is also known as a *summative program evaluation* and includes a summative program report showing whether the program has been implemented well and whether goals and objectives have been met (Mertens & Wilsen, 2012; Wholey, Hatry, & Newcomer, 2010).

With any type of program evaluation, the report of the findings, whether presented orally or in writing, is crucial to ensuring that positive changes will occur (Posavac, 2016). Stakeholders and decision makers must be able to understand how to take action based upon the findings and recommendations within the program evaluation report. There are several critical communication components in an evaluation report. These communication components are the message, the audience, and the medium (Wholey et al., 2010).

The message is what the writer wants the reader to remember. The findings and recommendations are at the core of this message. A report or presentation should include findings that are reasonable, concise, based upon research, and capable of offering new

insight to the audience (Wholey et al., 2010). For conciseness, there should be no more than five key ideas within the findings. The recommendations should provide solutions and options to the problems discussed within the program evaluation (Wholey et al., 2010).

The audience for the report should also be kept in mind. As Wholey et al. (2010) stated, "for an evaluation report to have impact it must persuade the movers and the shakers of the merits of its findings and recommendations" (p. 599). For this to happen, the decision makers must know about and understand the report (Posavac, 2016). This can be accomplished by ensuring that all stakeholders receive a copy of the report and/or that the report is presented in a formal setting to stakeholders and decision makers (Posavac, 2016; Wholey et al., 2010).

The medium of the program evaluation report is just as critical as the message and audience (Mertens & Wilson, 2012). Understanding that there are different media available to convey messages is important when crafting a program evaluation report. There are six format styles that can be used to present program evaluation findings and recommendations: "the Mom Test summary, the Killer paragraph, the outline, the two page executive summary, the ten page report and the technical report" (Wholey et al., 2010, p. 601). All of the formats build upon each other and are interconnected. One format that will reach more audiences and could have the largest impact is the 10-page report (Wholey et al., 2010). The 10-page report is an extension of an executive summary that includes more explanations and context for the reader. The 10-page report lends itself

to being distributed through multiple venues, including web posting, email, and hard copy (Wholey et al., 2010).

A presentation that is based on a well-written evaluation report and includes visuals or slides "can make a powerful impression on others" (Wholey et al., 2010, p. 616). A presentation provides the opportunity to connect face to face with stakeholders and decision makers. A visual presentation aligned with the program evaluation report allows for the audience to be engaged in the findings and recommendations on multiple levels and allows better processing of the information to make informed decisions (Posavac, 2016). Concluding a program evaluation with a report and presentation "is an unparalleled opportunity to persuade [audience members] of the wisdom of the report" (Wholey et al., 2010, p. 616).

Teacher Collaboration

In my research on teacher collaboration, I found references to varying definitions and levels. Some researchers define teacher collaboration as involving common goals, clear objectives, and the ability to engage in a process in which individuals offer differing perspectives but are equal parties in shared decision making (Akin & Neumann, 2013; Kafyulilo, 2012; Milteniene & Venclovaite, 2012; Smith et al., 2014). Teacher collaboration has been found to be a solution to problems that involve improving instructional practices and implementing standards and curriculum, and it occurs in various forms and at various levels (Forte & Forte, 2014; Kafyulilo, 2012; Seo & Han, 2013). Colbry, Hurwitz, and Adair (2014) noted that in "1980, 20% of work was team-based whereas, by 2010, 80% of work was team-based" (p. 1). Experts in the field

suggest that not only is collaboration more prevalent in the work place, but teacher collaboration is significant to teacher development in implementing new practices and, ultimately, improvement in student achievement (Forte & Forte, 2014; Smith et al., 2014).

Researchers have also shown that there are formal and informal teacher collaboration opportunities with varying degrees of true collaborative work. Seo and Han (2013) found in their study two kinds of teacher collaboration: fully functioning collaboration, which is "based on mutual acceptance, trust, openness, sharing, support, and recognition" (p. 224), and comfortable collaboration, which is "restricted in depth, scope, frequency, or persistence or a combination of these factors" (p. 224) and "does not extend beyond classroom boundaries, does not involve collaboration at the level of teaching practice and is focused on immediate issues and short-term initiatives" (p. 224). Seo and Han argued that comfortable collaboration is the most common form of collaboration and involves more storytelling and searching for materials and ideas, whereas fully functioning collaboration is rare in schools. Their reasoning for why it is difficult to find fully functioning teacher collaboration in schools is that teachers find it hard to truly collaborate with their colleagues due to various factors, including time, support for collaboration, space, and the skills to collaborate (Seo & Han, 2013).

Another component of teacher collaboration prevalent in the research consists of formal and informal collaboration opportunities. These formal and informal collaboration opportunities come in various forms. Informal teacher collaboration opportunities center around a collaborative culture and community of practice, which focus on collaborating

around problem solving or informal daily lesson planning (Gumus, Bulut, & Bellibas, 2013; Kafyulilo, 2012). A collaborative culture and community of practice involves teachers coming together around a common interest or problem and developing solutions or ideas to solve the problem. With the collaborative culture and community of practice, there has been found to be a quality control issue, given that the collaboration is voluntary and may be inconsistent (Kafyulilo, 2012).

The formal collaboration opportunities can be found in lesson study teams, teacher design teams and, professional learning communities (Kafyulilo, 2012; Riveros, 2012; Seo & Han, 2013). Lesson study teams are small groups of teachers or practitioners coming together to collaboratively design, teach, observe, analyze and study the single lesson developed (Kafyulilo, 2012). The lesson study teams are singular in focus and are for a finite amount of time. Teacher design teams are similar to lesson study teams; however, teacher design teams collaboratively work together around transforming instructional practices for a subject or content area. The teacher design teams work together to produce a unit of instruction and can commonly be referred to as professional learning communities (Voogt et al., 2011). DuFour (2004) indicated,

> the powerful collaboration that characterizes professional learning communities is a systematic process in which teachers work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice. Teachers work in teams, engaging in an ongoing cycle of questions that promote deep team learning. This process, in turn, leads to higher levels of student achievement. (p. 6)

Teacher collaboration has been seen as being the "cornerstone of schools as postmodern organizations, serving as a basis for decision making and problem solving, as well as being an explicitly articulated integrating principle of action, planning, culture, development, and research in schools" (Kutsyuruba, 2013, p. 28). Teacher collaboration also has the benefits of increasing collegiality, improving efficacy, enhancing motivation, fostering positive attitudes, increasing trust, and improving student achievement (Akin & Neumann, 2013; Gumus et al., 2013; Kutsyrubua, 2013; Riveros, 2012; Smith et al., 2014). However, some studies have found teacher collaboration also has its pitfalls. Specifically, teacher collaboration forced by administration, has no focus or clear objective, and does not allow for teacher input or choice will not be effective and can sometimes cause a negative culture (Riveros, 2012; Seo & Han, 2013).

This research guided the development of the project by identifying effective elements of teacher collaboration along with the downfalls of teacher collaboration. During this study, participants expressed the meaningfulness of having a common purpose and goal and having the time and support to participate in the collaboration work. By understanding that teacher collaboration has various forms and has different levels, I am able to make connections with the data collected from the interviews and make recommendations for the project.

Adult Learning Theory

Several participants during this study cited that the one time workshop as a professional development offering was not always very effective. Often a one-time workshop would be completely disconnected to what the teacher wanted to learn or from

their context in which they would use the acquired information (Burke, 2013). Understanding adult learning theory, models and styles is critical when developing and implementing any type of professional development for teachers (Chen, 2014; Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

Adult learning theory current research is largely based upon Eduard C. Lindeman's *The Meaning of Adult Education,* published in 1926, which was influenced by the educational philosophy of John Dewey (Knowles et al., 2015). Malcom Knowles, through his familiarity with Lindeman's research and research of his own, developed the term andragogy as the method and practice of teaching adult learners (Knowles et al., 2015; Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

Knowles (2015) noted some of Lindeman's key notions about adult learners and provide the following to be the basis of adult learning theory:

1. Adults are motivated to learn as they experience needs and interests that learning will satisfy; therefore, these are the appropriate starting points for organizing adult learning activities.
2. Adults' orientation to learning is life-centered; therefore, the appropriate units for organizing adult learning are life situations, not subjects.
3. Experience is the richest resource for adults' learning; therefore, the core methodology of adult education is the analysis of experience.
4. Adults have a deep need to be self-directing; therefore, the role of the teacher is to engage in a process of mutual inquiry with them rather than to transmit his or her knowledge to them and then evaluate their conformity to it.

5. Individual differences among people increase with age; therefore, adult education must make optimal provision for differences in style, time, place, and pace of learning. (p.23)

The foundations of the adult learning theory were also seen as valuable for the participants in this study. Participants in this study voiced their appreciation for being able to have choice in what their CCCG work focused on and whom they were working with. One participant stated they were a much more motivated learner because the areas of focus were meaningful and relevant to them. Other participants cited the value in having multiple perspectives and experiences of teachers within their CCCG teams. The CCCG provided the opportunity for the application of adult learning theory to professional development offerings for teachers and engaged teachers in meaningful and relevant learning.

It is critical to incorporate the foundations of adult learning theory in all professional development opportunities for teachers. This is especially important when an educational shift is happening and teachers are being asked to address new standards and instructional strategies (Beriswell, Bracey, Sherman-Morris, Huang, & Lee, 2016). Teachers will be more motivated to learn when they have choices. Chen (2014) found this to be true in his study of non-traditional adult students in higher education. When adult learners had choice in topic and were allowed to approach their learning in a meaningful way the learner behaviors changed in a positive manner.

The foundations of adult learning theory include valuing and respecting the learners' experience, knowledge, and perspective. Participants in this study shared this

sentiment and appreciated being able to create their own collaboration teams. A wide variety of experience and knowledge was brought and, because everyone found the topic meaningful, all perspectives were valued and appreciated. Gokmenoglu and Clark (2015) further corroborated this notion when they found, in their study of teacher's evaluation of professional development, teachers felt valued and became more engaged when their experience and knowledge were respected and appreciated. As Thomas, Bell, Spelman and Briody (2015) point out "adult learners seek out control over their learning experience" (p. 2) but also "must feel their opinions and experiences are valued, respected and used in ways that help them change and grow" (p. 2).

During the course of this study several participants voiced their perceptions on the importance of incorporating adult learning theory within professional development. Participants expressed their gratitude for being able to choose their own areas of study within the CCSS and with whom they were going to collaborate on this topic. Other participants voiced it was important to hear differing perspectives and experiences so everyone participating could be valued and respected for what they brought to the area of study.

Peer Instructional Coaching

Throughout this study several participants commented that having the ability to learn from their peers, gain resources, share ideas, and having the follow up support to implement new strategies coming from the collaboration time within the CCCG was beneficial. The aforementioned refers to peer instructional coaching which is "a process where teachers observe, support and provide feedback to each other in a co-equal and

affable manner" (Aderibigbe & Ajase, 2013, p. 126). Peer instructional coaching can support teachers in implementing new instructional strategies and standards through the opportunity to learn within their own context, be provided with follow up support, and be involved in reflective and collaborative conversations with their peers (Knight, 2011; Marsh, McCombs, & Martorell, 2012; Zepeda, Parylo, & Ilgan, 2013). By incorporating peer instructional coaching into the CCCG, teachers will be provided the follow up support, guidance, and collaboration necessary to transfer their learning into daily practice. Peer instructional coaching also allows for participants to learn within their own context and can adjust and reflect on instructional practices that may or may not work in their context. By experiencing the refinement and reflection, more in depth collaborative conversations will occur with colleagues during the CCCG project.

As Hooker (2013) noted in her review of peer coaching literature, "the concept of peer coaching in education has been around for some time, stemming from research of teachers' practice undertaken in the 1980s by Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers" (p. 129). Past and current research showed there are many definitions and uses of peer coaching but there are fundamental principles that each definition and use of peer coaching share. These principles encompass the following key characteristics:

- clear, honest and open lines of communication between the peer coach and participating teacher,
- an equal relationship that is non-evaluative,
- a relationship based on mutual respect and trust, and

- participation in reflective conversations and practice (Hooker, 2013; Knight, 2011; Zepeda et al., 2013).

These key characteristics are already partly embedded in the CCCG. Participants are working with colleagues of choice in an equal relationship based on respect, trust and is non evaluative. Several participants shared their appreciation for working with colleagues with a forum that is open, safe, respectful, and purposeful.

The benefits of peer instructional coaching have been found to improve instructional practices and ultimately positively impact student achievement (Hooker, 2013; Knight, 2011; Marsh et al., 2012). This is important when supporting teachers in learning new standards like the CCSS and aligned instructional strategies. Robertson, Ford-Connors, and Paratore (2014) in their study of peer coaching and literacy instruction, found one of the benefits of peer instructional coaching is the ability for teachers to engage in a learning practice. This facilitates teacher's understanding of an effective instructional strategy within their own learning context and improves the transferability of an instructional strategy into their daily instructional practices. Ultimately, the instructional strategy becomes part of the teacher's comfort zone for teaching.

Collaboration with peers was the most noted strength among participants of the CCCG as it was the foundation for participants to learn from and with each other as they deepened their understanding of the CCSS and how to integrate them into lessons and units of study. Zepeda et al. (2013) found peer instructional coaching can support and improve the development of professional learning communities and teacher collaboration.

Charteris and Smardon (2014) also found in their study on peer coaching and teacher leadership that peer instructional coaching builds leadership capacity among teachers and "is integral to professional learning processes where teachers are nurtured to be self-directed" (p. 120). Finally, another benefit of peer coaching is the collaborative teacher learning that takes place through the peer instructional coach relationship and the process of teachers working together to find innovative and engaging ways to promote student learning; therefore, enhancing student success (Hooker, 2013).

This research analysis guided the recommendation of incorporating the CCCG with peer instructional coaching to increase the transferability of acquired knowledge through the CCCG into participants' classrooms. Peer instructional coaching will provide an extension of the work within the CCCG directly into the participant's classrooms and would allow for further guidance through follow up support (Robertson et al., 2014). The incorporation of peer instructional coaching would also enhance the collaboration among teachers and improve the professional learning community at each school site (Zepeda et al., 2013). Ultimately, peer instructional coaching can increase the effectiveness of supporting teachers in learning the instructional shifts of the CCSS and how to incorporate the standards into their daily instructional practices.

Project Description

For this project, the MUSD CCCG was evaluated to determine the effectiveness in supporting Grades 4–through 6 teachers in applying the CCSS in their daily instruction through lessons and units of study. The results of the program evaluation indicated the CCCG allowed teachers to enhance their understanding and application of the CCSS

through meaningful collaboration time with their peers. In order to continue positively supporting teachers with their collaboration time, this project contains recommendations to increase the usage and effectiveness of the CCCG. The following describes the proposed project recommendations for the CCCG which will be presented at the Board of Education regular meeting and the Administrative Leadership Team (ALT).

First and foremost, the recommendation is to continue the funding for the CCCG. The results of the program evaluation show teachers value the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues especially when they are choosing the area of study and who they are collaborating with. The second recommendation is to increase the availability of the CCCG. This can be accomplished through advertising after each district professional development session, through the communication of instructional coaches and specialists at each site, and increased access and visibility on the district website. The third recommendation is to integrate the CCCG into school district initiatives to increase the transferability of instructional practices and knowledge gained through the CCCG. The fourth recommendation is to expand the amount of time offered by the CCCG by basing the time allowed for the CCCG by the scope of work the project requires. The final recommendation is to provide a central online location for participants of the CCCG to collaborate and share resources and final products as a result of their work through the CCCG.

Implementation

This program evaluation required the collection of qualitative data from seven teachers who participated in the MUSD CCCG. The results of the program evaluation

will be presented to the Board of Education, district and site administration and MUSD staff through a PowerPoint presentation (Appendix A) at a future Board of Education meeting held at the City Hall. Additionally, I will request permission to present the evaluation results to the site administrators and Administrative Leadership Team (ALT) at a future ALT meeting.

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

MUSD already has existing support and resources available to further support this project and the program evaluation recommendations. MUSD already has a system in place to offer the CCCG to all teachers and staff. Along with the CCCG already being in place, MUSD has instructional coaches focused in the area of mathematics and reading specialists who have the expertise and knowledge to support teachers in the area of English Language Arts. There are also many teachers who have previously participated in the CCCG and have the potential of becoming peer instructional coaches to further support the continued implementation of the CCCG. These existing resources and supports are critical components to note in the program evaluation presentation on recommendations.

Potential Barriers

The potential barriers that exist to implementing this project would be the Board of Education denying the request to speak in front of the Board of Education or the district administration denying my request to present at a future ALT meeting. If this barrier should present itself, I will emphasize the importance of the content within the evaluation report and the value of the presentation in their future budget discussions. I

will also request reasons for their denial in order to address any of their concerns. Another potential barrier would be the insufficient availability of budget and resources to implement and follow through on the recommendations for changes to the MUSD CCCG. Should this barrier present itself, I will be available to consult and answer any questions on how to create a successful and sustainable CCCG program.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

The program evaluation presentation of the evaluation report to the Board of Education will occur during a regularly scheduled Board of Education meeting in November. This timing will allow for decisions on budget and resource allocation for MUSD. I will also continue to work with the district administration throughout the 2016-2018 school years to implement the recommended changes and offer to conduct an additional program evaluation at the end of the 2017-2018 school year to determine the effectiveness of the recommendations that were implemented.

Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others

As the primary collector and analyzer of the qualitative data, I will have the sole responsibility of presenting the program evaluation presentation to the Board of Education, district administration and ALT. If the Board of Education and district administration implement the recommended changes from the program evaluation then I will also be their primary support in implementing the proposed changes. If the recommended changes are realized then the Director of Curriculum, Assessment and Learning (CAL) for MUSD will also have a role in supporting and implementing the changes. The Director of CAL will have the responsibility of working with the

instructional coaches, reading specialists and site administrators in advertising the CCCG, providing the follow through with the CCCG and answering questions regarding the CCCG. The district administration and the Board of Education will have the responsibility of supporting the changes instituted by their decision to support the program evaluation recommendations.

Project Implications

Possible Social Change Implications

This program evaluation on the MUSD CCCG for teachers in Grades 4 through 6 will provide MUSD information on how to support teachers for a successful and effective incorporation of the CCSS. This program evaluation and its recommendations come at a critical time for MUSD as it makes budget and resource allocation decisions for the 2017-2018 school year and beyond. The MUSD is in its final year of funding for the CCCG and will need to determine how to reallocate budget and personnel resources to either continue with recommended changes or discontinue the CCCG altogether.

This program evaluation identified the strengths and recommended changes critical in supporting teachers with their implementation of the CCSS. This study has positive social change implications for not only teachers but students and families as well. For the teachers and staff of MUSD, these positive social implications center on being able to work in a collaborative environment that values and respects varying experiences and knowledge as they implement the CCSS. For students, the positive social change is around participating in classrooms and learning environments where the CCSS is emphasized and is providing the foundations for students to understand and learn how

to problem solve in an ever changing global society along with how to communicate in an articulate and collaborative manner (Conley, 2011).

The Importance of the Project to Local Stakeholders in a Larger Context

Our world is ensconced in the information age where technology is ever changing. Advances in every area are being made at a rapid rate and our future generations will be working in jobs that aren't created yet. This makes it incumbent upon educators to provide students with the skills and knowledge to work collaboratively and be critical thinkers. By supporting teachers in their implementation of the CCSS, school districts are helping build a future generation of critical thinkers who are ready to engage in 21st century careers and are able to succeed in the global society.

Conclusion

The program evaluation of the MUSD CCCG and how it supports 4 through 6 grade teachers with the integration of the CCSS in their classroom instruction revealed a number of strengths and also identified specific ways the CCCG could be enhanced. Research uncovered in the literature provided a foundation for recommendations to improve the MUSD CCCG. An evaluation report and presentation to the MUSD Board of Education and stakeholders incorporated the program evaluation findings and recommendations. This allows for timely decisions on budget and personnel resource allocations. In addition, follow up support will be offered to ensure any of the recommendations adopted will have every opportunity to be effective. The application of the recommendations will have positive social change both at the local level and beyond

as the changes are focused on supporting teachers in their utilization of the CCSS in daily practices ultimately making students ready for their future careers in the 21st century.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

This project study was a qualitative program evaluation of how the MUSD CCCG supported fourth- through sixth-grade teachers in incorporating the CCSS in units of study and daily lessons. Collecting qualitative data from fourth- through sixth-grade teachers who participated in the MUSD CCCG provided information on how the MUSD CCCG supported teachers in accomplishing the integration of the CCSS into classroom instruction. Research revealed both strengths and areas of modification perceived by the participating teachers (Spaulding, 2014). Recommendations for improvement to the MUSD CCCG were based on a review of the literature and addressed changes that the MUSD board of education and administration will want to take to increase the effectiveness of the MUSD CCCG. In Section 4, I discuss the strengths and limitations of the project and analyze what I learned from the project study. The section concludes with an analysis and reflections as to the implications of the project and directions for future research in this area.

Project Strengths and Limitations

Strengths

A major strength of this project is the formative program evaluation itself, as the program evaluation represents an addition to the literature in addition to offering information from the teachers' perspectives on strengths and areas for modification in the MUSD CCCG. Using a formative evaluation that was based upon the framework for evaluating professional development by Killion and Roy (2009) allowed for examining

how teacher learning can change teaching practices and student learning during CCSS implementation. Eliers and D'Amico (2012) stated in their study of implementing the CCSS that "professional learning discourse among faculty and staff to reach the Standards" (p. 48) is critical for successful use of this model. This statement is supported through the perceptions of the teacher participants in this project study. Many of the participants mentioned that having the time and ability to engage in collaborative conversations with colleagues around the implementation of the CCSS helped them to further their integration of the CCSS into their lessons. Using information from the interviews, it was evident that teachers valued many of the same characteristics of professional development that the research identified, such as ongoing learning, collaboration with colleagues, learning within context, and the opportunity to have reflective conversations with colleagues (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Francis & Jacobsen, 2013). In addition, participants were able to identify areas of modification to the CCCG that aligned with research, such as having follow-up support in the form of the CCCG after workshops, having more choice in the topic areas, and having more collaboration time with colleagues. Merten and Wilson (2012) discussed the importance of integrating research into program evaluation recommendations. This project study provides recommendations grounded in research and aligned with the findings from Section 2.

An additional strength of this project is that the program evaluation benefits MUSD in the effort to listen to its stakeholders and develop the ability to make timely decisions on budget and personnel allocations. This program evaluation allowed for

teachers to have a voice concerning what is working and what requires modification in supporting their efforts to implement the CCSS. As Schuler (2014) discussed, any successful change that occurs within an educational institution must come from decisions that are both research and evidence based. With the information from this program evaluation, MUSD leaders will be able to make informed decisions based on evidence and research on how to support teachers in addressing the CCSS within their classroom instruction in future years.

Limitations

As stated in Section 2, this project had several limitations in addressing the problem. First, a limited number of fourth- through sixth-grade teachers participated in the MUSD CCCG, in contrast to over 100 teachers in kindergarten through high school who participated in the MUSD CCCG. Therefore, the seven teachers interviewed cannot represent the perceptions of the over 100 teachers on strengths and areas of modification in the MUSD CCCG (Creswell, 2012). The way in which this limitation was remediated involved providing a sufficient amount of descriptive data within the findings in Section 2.

Limitations were also evident in the decision to use a formative program evaluation; therefore, the results are only representative of a moment in time for the MUSD CCCG. The data collected for the formative program evaluation represent the strengths and areas of modification as they existed at the time data were collected. This means that the results cannot be applied to an evaluation of the MUSD CCCG at a later date (Lodico et al., 2010). The results of this formative program evaluation also cannot be

transferred to a larger population, as the goal of the program evaluation was to identify strengths and areas of modifications in the MUSD CCCG and not to investigate other types of collaboration grants as a whole (Creswell, 2012). Due to this limitation, careful consideration must be taken prior to applying any conclusions drawn from this project study to other programs.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

Although the program evaluation study was successful in responding to the research questions, potential alternatives to the study would have been able to expand the participant pool of teachers and identify how the professional development affected student achievement outcomes. The findings could then be transferred to local school districts with similar interests in offering professional development to teachers around integrating the CCSS into their instructional practices. Another consideration for an alternative approach would be to implement a mixed-methods program evaluation in an effort to understand more teachers' perceptions of the CCCG and how the program affected student achievement outcomes. Interviewing more participating teachers and collecting quantitative data on student achievement would reveal critical information on how the CCCG were supporting teachers across content and how the CCCG may have affected student achievement. Interested school districts could then use the information collected to improve professional development programs and understand their connection to student academic progress.

Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change

Scholarship

In the course of this project study, scholarship took on new meaning for me. This meaning includes the ability to construct new knowledge based on research and data findings. I also came to understand that scholarship involves being able to read research from a variety of sources and gain new knowledge and perspectives from those readings. Further, I came to appreciate the importance of perseverance in scholarship. This perseverance involves combing through an abundant amount of research and formulating the research into sequential thoughts and ideas. Finally, I learned that scholarship is about being able to use research and data to develop a plan that can be implemented to effect change.

Project Development

In order to truly effect positive social change, project development requires having clear goals and a vision of what one wants to accomplish through the project. This requires being able to identify the goal of the project as well as proper methods for data collection and analysis, being entrenched in current research, and having an understanding of how to apply the current research to data findings. Project development also requires a personal passion for the scope and sequence of the work because without the passion and desire to effect change through the project, implementation may not have the desired effects.

Leadership and Change

Throughout this project, I have held a position of leadership within my school district; I now have a leadership position at the state level. This project study allowed me to accomplish several things in developing my knowledge of leadership and change. First, this project provided me the opportunity to actively listen to stakeholders and gain an understanding of what works for them in developing their own knowledge and changing their instructional practices. From this opportunity, I was able to immediately apply my new knowledge to my everyday interactions with teachers and staff to help build a more collaborative environment. For example, I was able to form a committee of kindergarten to sixth-grade teachers called Teachers Leading Curriculum (TLC) and collaborate with this group on decisions that would directly impact their classroom practices. Second, this project entrenched me in current research and practices that I was able to apply in my leadership role at the district level. For example, in working with district leadership around instructional practices, I was able to inform the group on what current research indicates about professional development and how we can best support teachers. Finally, this project allowed me the opportunity to be engaged in project development from start to finish. With this experience, I will be able to lead other colleagues through project development and be a positive impetus for change.

Analysis of Self as Scholar

Prior to beginning this project study, I did not consider myself a scholar. That has drastically changed not only because I conducted this project study, but also because I now understand how to use my skills as a scholar toward a common purpose, goal, or

objective I may be involved in with other colleagues. This experience has allowed me to appreciate the idea of fully exploring the current research, looking at all perspectives while also being critical of research and ensuring that it is peer reviewed and has a foundation in scientifically based research practices. In addition, this experience provided the opportunity for me to collaborate with other scholars and to embrace perseverance.

Analysis of Self as Practitioner

Through this experience, I discovered important aspects of being a practitioner. First, I learned that although being able to understand and communicate all of the current research is great, if one is not able to apply it to practice, then it will not help to effect change. Understanding how to incorporate current research into everyday practices is vital to enhancing educational practices. This project study allowed me the opportunity to not only obtain knowledge of current research, but also be able to practice and apply the research to systems and protocols. Finally, this experience allowed me to understand that collaboration is key to implementation of practices. Not only does the research support this, but my own experience has shown me this as well. Throughout this project, I had the chance to collaborate with teachers on how to best make changes to the professional development opportunities they were involved in and how to best meet their needs.

Analysis of Self as Project Developer

Throughout my career, I have had the strength of being able to implement new programs, protocols, and systems. What this experience solidified for me is the necessity of binding one's project to current research and practices to ensure that it is grounded in a framework matching the goal and scope of the project. I gained a better understanding of

how to accomplish this through my experience in conducting and developing this project study.

Reflection on the Importance of the Work

Providing professional development that engages teachers in increasing their understanding of how to integrate the CCSS into their daily instruction is vital to creating future generations of critical thinkers and problem solvers (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012). Listening to teachers' perceptions and reading the current research on this topic indicated that focused collaboration with colleagues in an area of study of the teachers' choosing will support teachers as they implement the CCSS. This project has the potential to impact social change in many classrooms across MUSD. By improving the MUSD CCCG, the professional learning environments, culture, and communication at various school sites may be improved. By enhancing the MUSD CCCG, MUSD will be emphasizing the importance of collaboration among teachers and demonstrating the value of, and respect for, teachers' experiences and knowledge. This will effect a positive social change in the culture of MUSD.

This project study will also have far-reaching effects as it helps MUSD make decisions based on research and evidence on how to best support teachers in collaborating and building their understanding of the CCSS. When school districts support teachers in this endeavor, then students are provided the opportunity to engage in instruction that will enhance their ability to critically think and problem solve. Students will also be supported in being able to communicate clearly, effectively, and

collaboratively with their peers and adults. All of these skills are necessary as they embark on careers within the 21st century in an ever-changing global society.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Implications of this project study indicate that when learning how to implement new standards and aligned instructional strategies, teachers desire to have the opportunity to collaborate with their colleagues in an ongoing professional learning experience. The participation in an ongoing professional learning experience with their colleagues allows teachers to make the experience relevant and meaningful by being able to choose their area of focus and learn within their own context. This experience also provides ongoing learning with reflections and refinements to their instructional practices. Ultimately, by participating in a collaborative learning experience with colleagues, teachers were able to deepen their understanding of the CCSS and provide opportunities to successfully engage their students in mastering the CCSS.

The findings from this project study are relevant to those districts supporting their teachers in incorporating the CCSS and aligned instructional strategies through a professional development system. CCCG may be used in districts with teachers and administrators who are struggling to find the opportunity to collaborate and learning from each other to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the CCSS.

Future research is necessary in order to continue improvement in supporting teachers with their implementation of the CCSS. Because this project study was focused solely on a formative program evaluation of the MUSD CCCG, the findings cannot be

transferred to other similar school districts. Further research within a longitudinal study is needed to consider transferability (Creswell, 2012).

Conclusion

This project study has allowed me opportunities to grow not only as a scholar, but also as a practitioner, project developer, leader of change, and human being. Educating and supporting teachers in their endeavor to provide engaging and rigorous classroom instruction to all of their students are strong passions of mine. This project study allowed me to take my passion and turn it into something actionable that could affect positive social change for many.

This project study and my entire experience at Walden University allowed me the opportunity to enhance my critical-thinking skills, refine my thought process in project development, evaluate an abundance of current research, and analyze data into actionable findings. Through this journey, I was able to increase my ability to learn from others and become more attuned to the importance of effecting positive social change. Ultimately, this endeavor has made me a better leader who executes change and supports research-based practices to enhance education for teachers and students.

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Appendix A: Evaluation Report and Presentation

A Program Evaluation on District Funded Common Core Collaboration Grants used for Teacher Professional Development

Evaluation Report

Stephanie Gregson

Walden University

August 2016

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Purpose

The purpose of this program evaluation was to assess the effectiveness of the MUSD CCCG in supporting teachers in deepening their understanding of the CCSS and their integration of the CCSS into daily instructional practices.

Background

In 2010 the State of California adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English Language Arts and Mathematics. The adoption of these new standards required a whole new way of thinking about instructional practices. The CCSS require instructional shifts that include:

- rigorous content
- application of knowledge through critical thinking and problem solving skills
- collaborative discourse
- comprehending as well as critiquing
- citing text based evident in written and oral forms
- demonstrating academic independence
- a focus on college and career readiness steeped in 21st century skills (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012; Porter, McMaken, Hwang & Yang, 2011).

In order for a school district to support teachers in implementing the CCSS and changing their instructional practices to match the instructional shifts of the CCSS, school districts must be able to provide effective professional development. Effective professional development can be defined as having the

following characteristics: intensive, ongoing, connected to practice, focused on teaching and learning of specific content, connected to school initiatives and builds strong relationships among teachers through collaboration (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson and Orphanos, 2009; Francis & Jacobsen, 2013; Desimone, 2009; Guskey &Yoon, 2009). Furthermore, collaboration is a key component in helping teachers deepen their understanding and knowledge of new standards and aligned instructional practices. However, providing time for collaboration is among one of the biggest challenges for schools.

A school district supporting their teachers in integrating the CCSS into their instructional practices must keep these elements in mind when planning and coordinating professional development. Providing effective and ongoing professional development also requires allocating budget and resources accordingly. The MUSD received one time funding to support teachers with their implementation of the CCSS but will need to make decisions around budgets for future school years. Since 2013 the State of California has provided specific funding for the implementation of the CCSS. However, that funding is not ongoing and has been steadily decreasing since 2014. With this in mind, MUSD and other school districts in California will need to determine budget and resource priorities for the upcoming school years.

Currently, MUSD provides professional development in several different formats: district-wide professional development sessions, one time workshops presented by outside educational partners and the MUSD Common Core

Collaboration Grants (CCCG) that provide teacher collaboration time focused on CCSS. Schools within MUSD are also providing their own professional development based on their site and student demographics and needs. Over the course of two years MUSD district initiatives have focused on the following:

- Implementation of the Common Core State Standards in ELA/ELD and mathematics
- Early Literacy
- Restorative Practices
- Equity and Access
- Trauma Informed Practices
- Career Technical Education Pathways
- Technology Integration

With the many demands on budgets and resources, MUSD will need to evaluate and understand how these programs are increasing student success.

This program evaluation provides the research and information necessary for MUSD to make informed decisions on how best to allocate resources and budget to support teachers in their implementation of the CCSS.

Methodology

The framework used for this program evaluation was based upon Killion and Roy's conceptual framework for studying the effectiveness of professional development for teachers. The conceptual framework is based on the theory of change and focuses on the core features of professional development. The core

features of professional development became the criteria for this program evaluation. The criteria included the following:

Content focus: the professional development includes clear and focused content that is meaningful and relevant to the participating teachers.

Active learning: participants are actively engaged in the process of learning through various delivery modalities during the professional development.

Coherence: the professional development content is connected and integrated.

Duration: the duration of the professional development is long enough to allow for follow-up support and continuous learning.

Collective participation: the professional development includes a team approach that can vertical or horizontal in focus.

These criteria allow for an examination on how increased teacher knowledge or a change in attitudes and beliefs relates to a change in instructional practices and ultimately student learning. This program evaluation framework and criteria shaped the interview questions that were asked to seven selected 4th -6th grade teachers who participated in the CCCG. The participants were interviewed individually during their personal time. The data collected from the interviews was analyzed and coded using the program evaluation framework and criteria developed specifically for evaluating professional development. The following

section will outline the themes developed from the analysis of the data and how they relate to the criteria of the program evaluation.

Findings and Data Analysis

This section will begin with a breakdown of the data into the themes as they were developed from the analysis of the interviews conducted for this program evaluation. The conclusion of this section will provide an analysis of the data and how the findings relate to the criteria of the program evaluation.

Findings

Theme 1: Teachers enjoy having choice in their professional development.

Teachers felt the MUSD CCCG provided them the opportunity to make choices around what they studied within the CCSS, who they worked with and when. The flexibility of this type of professional development allowed for high engagement and motivation to learn and complete the tasks. By having choice the learning was more relevant to each teacher and provided for a higher transfer of learning.

A sampling of participant quotes:

Participant 2: “Because I had a part in choosing what I was working on, I was more motivated and focused.”

Participant 5: “allowed teachers the flexibility to identify needs, work together, research and problem-solve.”

Participant 7: “The grants are unique from other Common Core professional development in that they are teacher driven.”

Theme 2: Time is of the essence.

The MUSD CCCG allowed for teachers to have the time necessary to dive in deeper to the CCSS and the aligned instructional strategies. The time accorded to them through the CCCG, provided the opportunity to meet with vertical and horizontal teams and be compensated. Teachers felt their time was being valued and respected because they were being compensated and being provided choice. A sampling of participant quotes:

Participant 2: “The major support was the time provided to align the instructional strategies with the CCSS.”

Participant 1: “The grants just gave us the time that we needed.”

Participant 4: “I felt the grants gave me the time to understand the standards. By getting the grants, I felt the district was validating my time. I would use the time wisely and also make the time to work with my grant teammates.”

Theme 3: Collaboration: together is always better.

There is very powerful research around teacher collaboration. Teachers participating in the CCCG found the collaboration afforded to them through the CCCG was invaluable. They were able to collaborate with teachers who had the same interests, needs and were motivated to learn and deepen their knowledge of instructional practices. The CCCG also allowed the opportunity for teachers to meet and collaborate on a continuous basis. This ongoing collaboration allowed

for teachers to provide and receive feedback on instructional practices they were trying to implement. A sampling of participant quotes:

Participant 1: “Collaboration spreads a larger vision for the school vs. just one person going to a one time professional development session.”

Participant 3: “Our collaboration time to go through this process acted as a holistic professional development to hone our pedagogical practices around CCSS instruction.”

Participant 6: “Spending so much time collaborating with other teachers on the very same project is unique to the collaboration grants and proved to be huge in terms of increasing our understanding of the CCSS.”

Theme 4: Integrating and understanding the CCSS.

Teachers felt their participation in the CCCG increased their understanding of the CCSS and instructional strategies that address the instructional shifts of the CCSS. Many teachers found that through the time they spent with colleagues reading and collaborating around the CCSS helped to increase their knowledge. This increased knowledge helped teachers to develop aligned lessons, units of study and instructional practices to help their students become more successful in mastering the CCSS. The collaboration and time, allowed through the CCCG, provided teachers the opportunity to unpack the standards and research appropriate materials and resources necessary to increase student learning. A sampling of participant quotes:

Participant 5: “By increasing our understanding of the CCSS through the CCCG, it was much easier to differentiate this project and to scaffold the research and presentations to help each student be successful.”

Participant 4: “In developing a project through the grant, I had to understand the standard and what went into teaching it.”

Participant 7: “With my teammates on the grants we were able to look at how the standards expand vertically so that we made sure students were able to build on previous knowledge at each grade level. This made me more aware of what was needed and expected at the other grade levels. Within building projects to help expand knowledge I was also able to see how I can fit may of the standards together in an assignment.”

Improvements to the CCCG

There were several improvements that were noted by the participants. These suggestions centered on improving access and logistics of the CCCG. These improvements include: providing a central location to house all of the work and resources developed through the CCCG, increase advertising of the CCCG through the district website and site/district communication, include information regarding the CCCG after each district professional development session, provide a clear process to access the CCCG and include other areas of focus for the CCCG .

Data Analysis

All but one of the themes developed from the analysis of the data collected have alignment with the program evaluation framework criteria. The first two framework criteria of content focus and active learning align with the themes of choice and integrating and understanding the CCSS. Roy and Killion (2009) explain content focus and active learning are about engaging in "intentional, comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional learning focused on raising student achievement by improving teacher quality" (p.149). They also describe these criteria as having "multiple designs for team and whole-school professional learning that align with educator and student learning goals and support and encourage collaborative inquiry, problem solving, and learning among educators" (p.153). The CCCG allowed teachers the ability to engage in long term professional learning focused on increasing their understanding of the CCSS through a multiple design approach. The data also shows an alignment with teachers being involved in an inquiry based approach to increasing their learning and thus being more engaged in their professional learning.

The themes of time and collaboration have alignment to the criteria of duration and collective participation. The duration criterion is described by Roy and Killion (2009) as having multiple opportunities for teachers to collaborate during team meetings throughout the week and periodically as whole-school. Time was a definitive benefit of the CCCG as outlined in the data. Participants felt the CCCG provided teachers the time and motivation to meet along with

compensating them and showing value to their time. Because the CCCG focused on teams collaborating together there was the missing element of whole-school collaboration. Roy and Killion (2009) define collective participation as teachers working and learning "together sharing collective responsibility so that each individual and team contributes to the success of all students within the school" (p.149). The participants of the CCCG shared multiple perspectives of the benefits of having the opportunity to collaborate with their colleagues and have a sense of collective responsibility through this collaboration time as can be seen from the data collected. The word collaboration was mentioned frequently and with great appreciation of the meaningfulness collaboration brought to the professional learning opportunity of the CCCG and to increasing the collective responsibility for meeting the needs of all students.

One criterion from the program evaluation framework criteria did not align to the data collected from the participants. This criterion focused on coherence. Roy and Killion (2009) define coherence within the program evaluation framework as the content, focus and objectives of the professional learning permeating the initiatives within the school and are supported at the district level. Due to this misalignment of the data and criterion, a recommendation was developed to increase the coherence of the CCCG with district initiatives. The following section provides recommendations based on the analysis of the data and the alignment of the program evaluation framework criteria.

Recommendations

This program evaluation allowed for a retrospective view of the CCCG and how they can be improved to further support teachers in increasing their understanding of the CCSS and applying CCSS aligned instructional practices into their daily instruction. This program evaluation indicates that there are many aspects of the CCCG that are successful in supporting teachers. The program evaluation also indicates there are improvements and enhancements that can be made to the CCCG. The following are recommendations to increase the effectiveness of the MUSD CCCG:

Recommendation 1: During the 2017/2018 school year continue the funding for the CCCG for all teachers in all content areas. Prioritize funding sources for upcoming school years to sustain the CCCG.

Recommendation 2: Increase access of information regarding the CCCG on the district website. After each district provided professional development session, each presenter provides information on the CCCG and hands out applications. Instructional Coaches and Reading Specialists at each of their school sites provide information on how to access the CCCG.

Recommendation 3: Use district initiatives as focus for topics within the CCCG. Provide CCCG as a foundation for peer instructional coaching with instructional coaches in the areas of math and reading.

Recommendation 4: Let the scope of the project determine the amount of time for each collaboration grant. Allow teachers to choose the amount of time, based

on a range of hours, necessary to complete the work outlined in CCCG application submission.

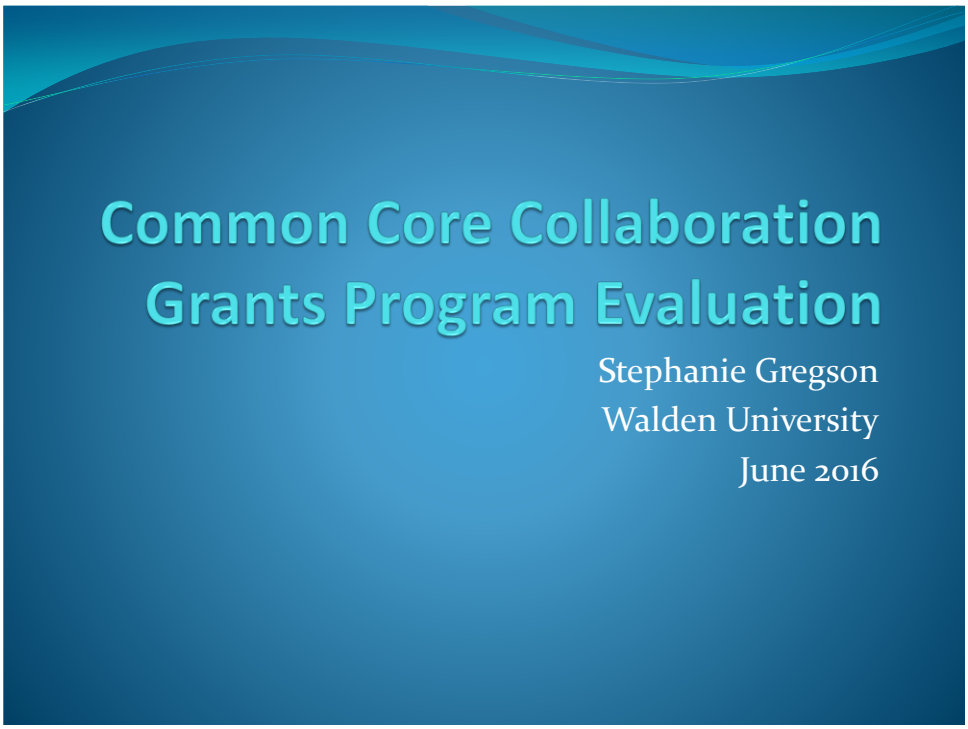
Recommendation 5: Use an online tool as a central location for CCCG topics and projects. This tool could also be used as a centralized collaboration place for CCCG teams to collaborate amongst other teams.

PowerPoint Presentation

The program evaluation report also consists of a PowerPoint presentation of the formative program evaluation conducted on the MUSD CCCG. This presentation will be given to the MUSD Board of Education, district administrators, and Administrative Leadership Team. This presentation is expected to last between 35-40 minutes including an opportunity for questions and answers. The objective of this presentation is to provide the Board of Education and stakeholders with the pertinent information from this program evaluation, including strengths, areas of modifications found in the evaluation and the recommendations based on the current research in the areas of professional development, adult learning theory, teacher collaboration and peer instructional coaching.

The presentation begins with building a foundation on the research conducted for this program evaluation. This will include the purpose, background, methodology and the importance of the research. A brief explanation of the characteristics of effective professional development will be shared. Information on the research methodology includes the program evaluation framework, participants and data analysis process will also be shared. This portion of the presentation will be approximately five to ten minutes long as the majority of the presentation will be dedicated to the findings of the program evaluation and the research based recommendations. The presentation of the findings and recommendations is expected to be approximately 10-15 minutes long. After the

conclusion of the presentation of the program evaluation results, a question and answer period will be held to allow for clarifying questions. The question and answer session may last up to 30 minutes depending on the amount of questions and if there is any need for further discussion with the Board of Education. The PowerPoint presentation is provided below:



Overview of Presentation

- Purpose
- Background
- Methodology
- Findings
- Recommendations

Purpose

- Determine the effectiveness of the CCCG in supporting 4th- 6th grade teachers in their implementation of the CCSS.
- Provide information and research for budget and personnel allocations regarding professional development.

Background

- In 2010 the State of California along with 42 other states adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English Language Arts and Mathematics (corestandards.org, 2014).
- In 2013, California school districts received one-time funds from the California Department of Education to provide professional development for the implementation of the CCSS (California Education Code, 2013)

Current Research

Effective professional development includes the following characteristics:

- Collaboration amongst peers
- On-going
- Within own learning context
- Focused on teaching and learning
- Relevant & meaningful

(Hill, Beisiegel & Jacob, 2013; Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Francis & Jacobsen, 2013)

Methodology

- Program evaluation framework based upon theory of change and conceptual framework for evaluating professional development
- Seven 4th – 6th grade teachers that participated in the CCCG
- Questions and data analysis based on program evaluation framework

Research Findings

Theme 1: Teacher Choice

"Because I was able to choose areas that were relevant and of interest to me, I was a motivated learner."

"allowed teachers the flexibility to identify needs, work together, research, and problem-solve."

"Because I had a part in choosing what I was working on, I was more motivated and focused."

Research Findings

Theme 2: Time

"just gave us the time that we needed"

"The major support was the time provided to align the instructional strategies with the CCSS."

"I felt the grants gave me the time to understand the standards. By getting the grants, I felt the district was validating my time. I would use the time wisely and also make the time to work with my grant teammates."

Research Findings

Theme 3: Collaboration

"Collaboration spreads a larger vision for the school vs. just one person going to a one time professional development session."

"share their expertise with their colleagues is often the most valuable professional development to me."

"Spending so much time collaborating with another teacher on the very same project is unique to the collaboration grants and proved to be huge in terms of increasing our understanding of the CCSS."

Research Findings

Theme 4: Integration and Understanding of the CCSS

"By increasing our understanding of the CCSS through the CCCG, it was much easier to differentiate this project and to scaffold the research and presentations to help each student be successful."

"I understand the CCSS better thus design different instructional strategies that will work with the students and the projects."

"In developing a project through the grant, I had to understand the standard and what went into teaching it."

Question 6: Improvements

- Central location to house all of the grant projects/topics
- Increase advertising
- Include the information regarding the CCCG after each district professional development session
- Clear process to access the CCCG
- Include other areas of focus for the CCCG

Recommendations

1: Continue funding the CCCG

- During the 17/18 school year continue the funding for the CCCG for all teachers in all content areas
- Prioritize funding sources for upcoming school years to sustain the CCCG

Recommendations

2: Increase the availability of the CCCG

- After each district provided professional development session, each presenter provides information on the CCCG and hands out applications
- Instructional Coaches & Reading Specialists at each of their school sites provide information on how to access the CCCG
- Increase access on district website

Recommendations

3: Integration of the CCCG into peer instructional coaching & district initiatives

- Use district initiatives as focus for topics within the CCCG
- Provide CCCG as a foundation for peer instructional coaching with instructional coaches in the areas of math and reading
- Use CCCG as a continuation of district professional development sessions to increase transferability of instructional practices and knowledge

Recommendations

4: Increase the amount of time offered for each CCCG

- Allow teachers to choose the amount of time necessary to complete their work
- Let the scope of the project determine the amount of time for each collaboration grant

Recommendations

5: Provide a central location for participants of CCCG to collaborate

- Use an online tool as a central location for CCCG topics and projects
- This tool could also be used as a centralized collaboration place for CCCG teams to collaborate amongst other teams

Questions?

Comments?

Concerns?

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Each interview will last between 45 minutes to 60 minutes and all interviews will be audio taped and transcribed for later use. All interview material will be kept under lock and key at the residence of the researcher so that the identity of the participants will be protected and their confidentiality maintained. The interviews will take place either at the school of the participant or a neutral place of the participants choosing. The location of the interview will be chosen by the participant to help them feel the most comfortable during the discussion, such as a local coffee shop or cafe. Questions for the interview are below. They are open ended questions and may be expanded upon once the interview progresses.

1. Based upon your previous experience with regular school professional development used prior to the use of the current model, how effective do you believe the Common Core Collaboration Grants program has been in supporting your implementation of the Common Core State Standards? Please explain.
2. Prior to the Common Core Collaboration Grants, how did the district support your implementation of the Common Core State Standards?
3. How has the Common Core Collaboration Grants program supported your implementation of the Common Core State Standards?
4. How has the Common Core Collaboration Grants program supported your implementation of CCSS aligned instructional strategies?
5. How do you feel the Common Core Collaboration Grants help expand your understanding of the Common Core State Standards?

6. What aspects of the Common Core Collaboration Grants need to be improved?
7. How do the Common Core Collaboration Grants program compare to previous types of professional development in preparing you to teach the Common Core State Standards?